

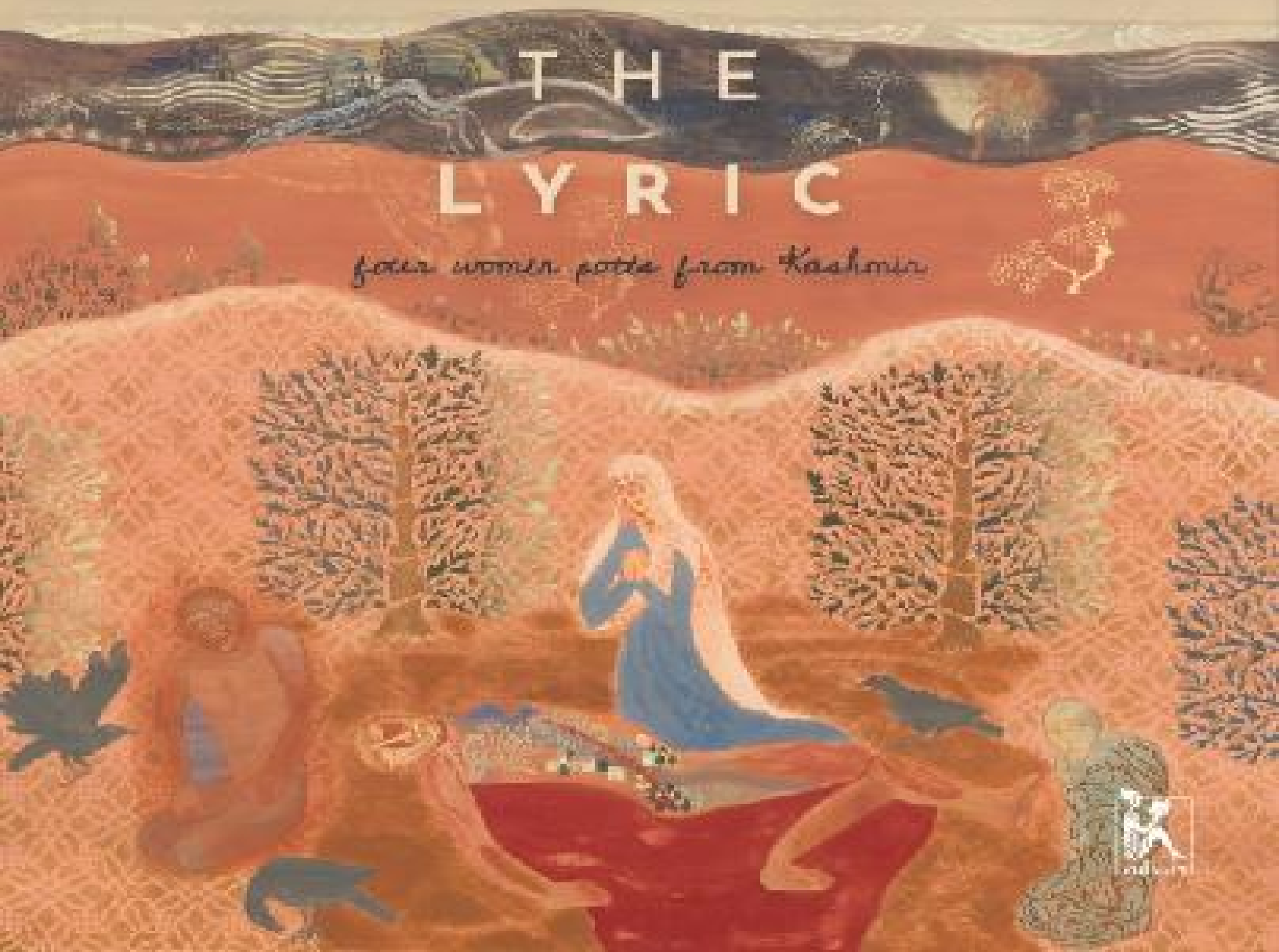
introduced and translated by
NEERJA MATTOO

THE
MYSTIC

and

THE
LYRIC

four women poets from Kashmir



The Mystic and The Lyric *Four Women Poets from Kashmir*

My body in bliss, a river of wine
My eyes are open, saqi, come fill these cups
Hu hu ha!
I cry, madness in my heart.

Lal Ded, Habba Khatun, Rupa Bhavani, Arnimal: these four women poets, dating from different periods in the history of Kashmir, are household names in the valley and are claimed by all, no matter what religious, ethnic or other group they belong to.

In this beautiful volume, Neerja Mattoo brings their work together for the first time, placing it in two traditions, the mystic and the lyric. Fine and nuanced translations of their poems are accompanied by brief introductions to their work that place the women in a historical context and deal with both the facts and the beliefs about their work.

Neerja Mattoo taught English at Government College for Women in Srinagar. She is Chief Editor of the quarterly Kashmiri journal, *Miraas*.



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Four Women Poets from Kashmir

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To all the women of Kashmir who never lost their voice

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Acknowledgments

My first unredeemable debt is to Prabha Devi, a self-effacing scholar of Kashmir Saivism, who enabled me to enter the world of Lalded and Rupa Bhavani with some degree of confidence.

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Four women poets have helped shape Kashmir's literary imagination. In my mind, each has a distinct image, rooted in the stories I heard as a child. Lalded I see as all thought, walking through towns and villages, a naked, shapeless body, the folds of her lower abdomen drooping over her thighs. Habba Khatun appears crowned and her headdress plumed, sometimes as queen, sometimes as courtesan, in majestic robes, strolling over hill and dale. Rupa Bhawani is a radiant face, framed by hair loosely rolled into matted strands, a *tapasvani* meditating in caves and at lonely heights. And then there is Arinimal, draped modestly, but in a vivid peacock-feather hued shot-silk or cherry red-velvet pheran, standing forlorn against the background of a mud-brick house set in a green valley or against the backdrop of the Mar canal in the Rainawari suburb of Srinagar.

These shared images help us to understand the life and work of these four women poets. The lack of concern with adornments of the mystic Lalded contrasts with the pride in her physical beauty and exquisite robes of the romantic Habba Khatun. Rupa Bhavani, or Alakeshwari—the goddess with locks of hair—is absorbed in the quest for self-realization while Arinimal is invested with the romance of loneliness, a brooding reproach in her eyes for the forever absent lover.

As poets these women inhabit not just the collective memory of Kashmiris but are part of their living oral tradition. Folk singers begin their performance with Lalded's *vaakhs* (quatrains). Arinimal's pain of unrequited love and Habba Khatun's complaints about her in-laws are ironic wedding *vatsans* or songs. Rupa Bhavani's sites of meditation are now shrines where her *vaakhs* are chanted in annual celebrations. The linguistic felicity of Kashmiris, their talent for the apt word, potent proverb and rhyming analogy, is a legacy of these poets.

The origins of the two main streams of Kashmiri poetry are the mystical compositions of Lalded (14th century) and the romantic, secular lyrics of Habba Khatun (16th century). Lalded was followed by Rupa Bhavani (17th century) in the mystic tradition, while Arinimal (in the 18th century) was heir to the romantic love lyrics of Habba Khatun. Each of these women charted her particular course in life and art, refusing in her own way, to submit to the roles assigned by contemporary society. Two walked out of their marriages and the culture of silence to express their spiritual yearnings

in verses of solemn beauty. The other two, separated from their lovers, openly spoke about their physical longing in the poetry of unforgettable songs. It helped that Kashmiris give mystics the liberty to break social taboos, the broken-hearted space to lament, and to treasure both.

These poets belonged to very different times, yet there is a similarity of concerns and expressions to be found in their works as well as a unique, individual note. At first glance, a common spiritual quest informs the utterances of Lalded and Rupa Bhavani, both of whom have the stature of saints in Kashmir. But the linguistic and stylistic tools each used, and the tone of their voices, is significantly different. Lalded's language is easy to understand in spite of the esoteric thought that lies within it. Perhaps her *vaakhs*, having travelled down the centuries in an oral tradition owned also by the unlettered, have had their vocabulary simplified in recitation. Rupa Bhavani's poetry, in contrast, was written down and preserved in its original, Sanskritised form, and therefore remained the possession of the Kashmiri Pandit intellectual elite.

While Habba Khatun and Arnimal might both appear to sing of nothing but lyrics of lovelorn souls, their perceptions, attitudes, representational methods and allusions are not the same, but products of different socio-cultural traditions and milieus. One was a Muslim in the 16th century Moghul Kashmir, the other a Kashmiri Pandit in 18th century Kashmir ruled by the Pathans. Habba Khatun's poetry alludes to the Quran while Arnimal appeals to Krishna. Habba Khatun celebrates her own beauty and nature while Arnimal is more modest and self-absorbed.

Each of these women would be considered a significant voice by any standard of literary judgement, but their lives and work remain largely unknown outside Kashmir. Some western and Kashmiri scholars have done valuable work on Lalded but the other three have been largely ignored. Not all their poems have been translated into English, and they are the subject of undeservedly brief references in books on Kashmiri literature in English. This book seeks to undo this injustice.

Lalded Lalded was born sometime between the second and the fourth decades of the 14th century, when Islam had come to Kashmir in a gently persuasive manner. The Saiva practices were

still largely present among people. But traditional Hindu/Brahminical beliefs were challenged by the Islam of the Sufis, for whom Kashmir was a refuge from religious persecution in their homes in Iraq and Iran where they were branded as heretics. It was not a conflict of creeds but a time of religious debate and philosophical controversies, a disturbing yet exhilarating atmosphere for those bothered by the desire to know the unknown. The two religious systems or schools of thought were beginning to learn to come to terms with each other in an atmosphere of intellectual freedom. Instead of generating hatred or bitterness, attempts were being made to understand and synthesize the essence of the two systems. Similarities were discovered between the branch of Hinduism known as Saivism, practised by the Kashmiris, and the practices and beliefs of the Sufis. The result was the founding of the Order of the Rishis or Kashmiri Sufism.

Lal contributed not only to making the Saivite philosophy accessible to the people but also to the growth of the syncretic Rishism of Kashmir by demonstrating that the essence of spirituality was the same in both philosophies. She did not start a movement or found an order, but her legacy is enduring. Both Muslims and Kashmiri Pandits, men and women, accepted her as their voice. The Patron Saint of Kashmir, Sheikh Nuruddin Noorani, popularly known as Nund Rishi, whose shrine at Tsrar-i-Sharif is an important pilgrimage centre and who was born while she was still alive, paid a tribute to her in these words, so syncretic in their vocabulary:

That Lal of Padmanpore Drank amrit sip by sip That Lal is our own avatar
God grant me the same boon.

Prominent among the Sufis and religious Pandits, she is supposed to have interacted with, are Mir Syed Ali Hamadani, an Iranian Sufi who came to Kashmir for the first time in 1372 to spread Islam, and the Kashmiri Brahmin scholar Siddha Srikanth, who was her guru. It is amazing that a woman—a housewife and victim of a tyrannical mother-in-law—could

choose an alternative course for herself in the middle of the 14th century. She broke away from accepted dogma and rituals and spoke, with a prophetic, poetic voice, words of profound philosophical value.

Her verses known as *vaakhs* are little gems of observation and prescription, answering primeval spiritual questions, yet accessible to the common man and woman of Kashmir because they are in their own language and use metaphors from daily life. Mysticism and practical wisdom become fused in them. To this day the Kashmiris quote them whenever faced with existential dilemmas. The problem of how to communicate the elusive mystic experience is resolved through the use of imagery instead of the cryptic or elliptical word. Here is a *vaakh* that speaks of the yogic practice of breath control and the quest for Shiva, while effortlessly giving herself agency by using ‘I’.

The bellows I pressed, muffled its breath The lamp lit, in its radiance
I stood revealed I let the inner light burst out into the open Caught
hold Him and would not let go.

Sometimes she descends from mystic heights to just give good advice:
Water not the nettles with milk Do not warm a serpent’s eggs Sow not the
sandbar with seed Waste not oil on cakes of chaff.

Rupa Bhavani Rupa Bhavani (1625–1721) too was born in a Kashmiri Brahmin family and was quite well-versed in Sanskrit and classical Persian literatures. Kashmir was ruled by the Mughals at the time and Persian was the official language and it influenced her vocabulary. Of significance is the fact that, like Lal Ded, she dialogued with prominent Hindu and Muslim mystics of the time like Rishi Peer, Mohammad Sadiq Qalandar and Baba Asraruddin Quadiri, prominent Sufis and rishis, who acknowledged her spiritual power. Her body, like Lal Ded’s, is said to have disappeared at her death. Mohammad Shah Qalandar is believed to have paid her a tribute in Persian:

Knower of the self and first avatar Epitome of the merciful and self-aware Flies to the highest heaven With her pure heart and kindness.

She acknowledged Lalded and her father Madhav Dhar as her gurus. She is said to have been inclined towards a mystic quest from her childhood and her verses are a record of her spiritual journey. She studied both Kashmiri Saivism and Sufism. Soon after an unhappy marriage, she renounced the life of a householder, came back to her father's house where she was venerated as a saint, and finally left home and journeyed upon a path in search of salvation. Her *vaakhs*, in a Kashmiri redolent with Sanskrit and Persian vocabulary, are steeped in deep mystic thought that seems to progress towards a Sufi ideal of self-annihilation. The springs and secret grottoes associated with her mystic experiences are well-known to Kashmiris who venerate them as shrines. The moral and ethical instructions in her verses had a profound impact on Kashmiri Pandit society. Her stress on non-attachment to material possessions and the goal of self-realization is evident in the following verse:

Deep into the pit of my body I sank But vital breath wafted me up.
Resonance of the word awakened the Kundalini Draughts of wine brought
me back to true consciousness.

The influence of the Sufis is evident in the choice of diction and imagery:

My body in bliss a river of wine My eyes are open, saqi, come fill these
cups Hu hu ha!
I cry, madness in my heart.

Habba Khatun With Habba Khatun (1553–1605) we enter a world of great lyrical beauty. She is responsible for the rise of Romanticism in Kashmiri poetry. Her love and knowledge of music, the 'Sufiana', which is the classical music of Kashmir, enabled her to set her own songs to music. Her poems are, therefore, not only the possession of the elite but an important part of the repertoire of folk-singers, and are known to all

Kashmiris, whether rural or urban. They tell of a lover's longings, the agonies of separation and the joys of union. While tracing the emotional life of a woman, her poems become her autobiography.

All the major periods of her unusual life have been chronicled in her lyrics. She begins as a young woman celebrating the beauty of nature in Kashmir. Her brief first marriage to an unlettered villager far inferior to her in sensibility and awareness, leads to physical and emotional abuse, but does not destroy her creativity. She sets down the sorrows of a sensitive, under-privileged daughter-in-law and wife in a traditional Kashmiri household:

I'm not happy in my in-laws' home O parents mine, help me find a way

They sent me out to fetch some water But parents mine, the pot, it broke

You must buy me a new one Or pay its price, O parents mine

The child in me, powdered to vermillion Climbing to the plateau was so hard
I searched for bits of the broken pot, my foot was pierced by a shard
It was salt on my wounds, O parents mine

...

Friendless, forsaken, forlorn My heavy heart ready to burst Habba Khatun
tells you in signs Won't you wake up, O parents mine?

She was freed from such marital bondage when she was divorced. But her beauty, and poetic and musical talent altered her destiny. She became the consort of the then king of Kashmir, Yusuf Shah Chak, the last Kashmiri king of Kashmir. Akbar the Moghul king of India (1542–1605) annexed Kashmir in 1589 and forced him to leave and live in exile in the Indian state of Bihar.

Habba Khatun's poetry is perhaps the first attempt at a secular, lyrical note in Kashmiri poetry. Instead of seeking a philosophical, mystical, or abstract ideal, Habba Khatun's is a physical desire for the earthly lover.

A smouldering fire consumes my self Ah, let no one lose one's
beloved in youth!
Garlands of jasmine I weave for you Come my love, revel in my
pomegranate buds.

She describes the world of the senses, the beauty of the countryside with
its lakes, meadows, streams and the riches of fruit and flower and relates
them to her own shifting moods. Love and longing is the dominant theme:
My heart you took and hid yourself Come back, my flower-decked lover

Come friend, let's look for dandelion leaves But can one evade what fate
decrees?

Oh how the mobs stain my name!
Come back, my flower-decked lover

Come friend, let's look for basil leaves-
But ah, the wound his axe inflicts!
Did he ever send you to know my plight?
Come back, my flower decked-lover.

Here she sings of her longing:
Pain permeates my being
How he fills me with longing for him
A glance he threw over the wall
I would've wrapped him with the finest wool shawl
But why did he take offence?
From the doorway he looked at me-
Who showed him the way to my home?
And now there's just anguish and pain.

***Arnimal Arnimal (1737–1778) is a poignant voice, singing of
unrequited love in musical lyrics of great beauty. She lived when
Kashmir was under the Afghans who ruled through their
governors. A Kashmiri Pandit, her husband was a Persian
scholar as well as a successful man of the world who had little***

use for the sensitive Arnimal. He was an ambitious man who rose to be a luminary in the court of the Afghan king who ruled Kashmir through his governor. Thus, he spent most of his life in Kabul while his wife pined for him. The loneliness and yearnings of a young wife deprived of her husband's love are some of the themes of which she sings unabashedly.

The jewels of my eyes I'll lay at your feet Come stay with me,
beloved mine, my childhood friend.

Like a kukil, you flew to rivers and shallows And my heart was torn
in two Deceived by calls that were not yours Come stay with me,
beloved mine, my childhood friend.

Her reproach is normally gentle, but sometimes she is fearless in exposing the husband's cruel, physical abuse:

With his spear he pinned me down My necklace broke, my blouse was torn
One hair of his beloved head Is enough to pluck out my heart The pearls
from my neck lie scattered He tore them off my throat Still, I'd have him
near.

Her tragic life is mirrored in verses of great feeling. Her contemporary high-born European women would occupy themselves in socializing or petit or gros point embroidery and tapestry making, while Kashmiri women of the same class and trapped in a similar situation would spend time spinning fine pashmina wool on their elegantly wrought wooden spinning wheels. This wheel was Arnimal's constant companion, and with its whirr and hum she spun the gossamer threads of fine wool and fine verses known as *vatsuns*:

Do not complain and whine, my spinning wheel With scented oils I'll
anoint your whorls From the mud raise your head O hyacinth The
narcissus waits with her cup overfull A woodbine vine am I and will not
bloom anew With scented oils I'll anoint your whorls!

While Lalded and Rupa Bhavani were married to men far inferior in intellect, and Habba Khatun according to legend, to almost a village idiot, Arnimal's husband was a scholar, poet and linguist, a sophisticated member of the courtly circle of the Afghan governor of the time, Jumma Khan, who

himself was interested in music and poetry and therefore a patron of poets. But still the husband, Bhavanidass Kachru, had no use for the sensibilities of his wife and did not appreciate her poetic skill. Perhaps, the unpretentious lyricism of her songs in the language of the people—Kashmiri—did not appeal to his serious, purposeful, even moral view of poetry. Ironically, Arinimal's songs reached out of her closet through time and place, and are sung today, while her husband's Persian magnum opus *Behr-I-taveel* lies forgotten in some archive. Clearly, women's voices have a way of escaping stifling silences!



Introduction

In the fourteenth century, a woman composing poetry in any language was a rarity, but in Kashmir, a voice from that time set off a resonance that can still be heard in clear tones today, many centuries later. She spoke directly to the people and her words were heard and received with all seriousness, recorded in collective memory, and later, put down on paper.

This woman is the mystic poet, Lalded, whom the Kashmiris venerate to this day as a prophetess, moral guide and font of practical wisdom and whose words they quote at many moments in their lives. In fact, the Kashmiri language owes much of its richness of phrase and metaphor to her. Apart from its spiritual message, her work, like Shakespeare's, has a timeless quality, and is widely accessible.

Unlike most women who have left an imprint on history, Lalded was not related to an important person in the social or spiritual hierarchy of the time. Nor was she located in an ashram or convent; she did not live in a community of women—like some medieval Christian women mystics—where a band of devoted followers would note down every word she uttered. It was the import, sonority and direct appeal of her utterances that reached out to the peasant and the priest, the prince and the plebeian, and stayed imprinted on their minds, travelling down the ages by word of mouth.

A Muslim and a Hindu identity was thrust upon her by the names given to her, Lalla Arifa or Lalleshwari, respectively, to suit a particular religious inclination, as though she were a trophy of conquest or resistance. But for the common men and women of Kashmir she was just their mother. The use of the words 'conquest' and 'resistance' in this context need an explanation and for this we must look at the times in which she lived.

From the eleventh century onwards, with the decline of centuries of Hindu rule, Islam was beginning to make forays into Kashmir in various forms, aggressively as well as gently. It tried to come as an invading force,

first under the command of Mahmud of Ghazni, through his expeditions to India in 1015 AD and again in 1021 AD, but failed to establish itself, because he faced stiff opposition from the local Hindu king and had to beat a retreat. It made a gentler entry into Kashmir as a new philosophy brought in by the Sufi and other learned Muslim scholars from Iran and central Asia where Islam had swept aside other older religions and had become the common faith.

With the rise of Turkish militarism and its imperialistic expansion, however, the Sufi way of life with its pacifist message and belief in the brotherhood of all human beings, came into conflict with the powerful establishment which had developed an interest in hierarchies and exclusiveness to perpetuate itself. The radical message of Sufism, consequently, was under threat. The orthodoxy branded the Sufis as heretics, particularly after the renowned Sufi, Mansur-al-Hallaj, deeply offended the Muslim clergy by pronouncing the words, 'An-al-haqq' (I am God). His words had merely expressed the Sufi belief in the immanent presence of God in everything, including a human being, but to the uninitiated it was blasphemy, punishable by nothing short of death. Finally, the tyrannical rule of the Mongols who, led by conqueror Timur, spread their empire to Iran, also drove many Sufis away from their original home to this valley with which there had been earlier contact.

Kashmir stood at the crossroads of various cultural and commercial influences and transactions. While travelling and interacting with the people of central Asia, Mahayana Buddhism and its austere asceticism and meditative practices had already influenced the Islamic faith of the Sufis. In Kashmir, the people were still Hindu, but theirs had been a branch of Hinduism which is known as Kashmiri Saivism. In it too we find the influence of Buddhism, in its having broken free both from Brahmanical structures and idol worship, and its belief that union with God was possible for anyone who would wish to find it, no matter what their caste or religious fold. To the Sufis, therefore, Kashmir would seem to be familiar territory.

However, with political instability and resultant decay of the economic, cultural and social fabric, the religious practices of the common populace of Kashmir had also lost their original meaning. The people had forgotten the essence of Saivism and in the absence of worthy commentators or teachers, their religion had degenerated into mere Tantric ritual. From the

sophistication of real Saiva Darshan it had fallen into what is derogatively known as Vamachar (secret, occult practices).

To understand the source of Lalded's mysticism it is important to keep in mind the essential features of Kashmir Saivism, a tradition that goes back to ancient times but is documented from the eighth century onwards. According to the Saivites of Kashmir, it is the sage Durvasa who first revealed the original mantras in his Siva sutras, explaining the philosophy and practices of the belief. In a story reminiscent of the revelation of the ten commandments to Moses, it is said that Shiva himself revealed them to Durvasa by drawing him to a rock at the foot of the Mahadev range in Srinagar, on which they were inscribed. These original sources are known among the believers as Agamas (arrived on its own) which suggests their divine origin. The rock known as Shankar Pal (the rock of Shankar, another name of Shiva) can still be seen, but there are, alas, no words of wisdom to be seen on it today—it is smooth as a slate wiped clean.

The sutras were later further explained and elaborated upon by a succession of scholars known as Saiva Acharyas (teachers), prominent among whom were Vasugupta, Batta Kallata, Somanand, Utpaldev and Abinavagupta. From the ninth to the eleventh centuries, commentaries and scholarly exposition of the subtle forms and content of Saivism, based on logic as well as intuitive comprehension, led to the evolution of a uniquely Kashmiri mystic philosophy, Trika Sastra, or what is now known as Kashmir Saivism.

The world, in the Trika Sastra view, is not an illusion, but real, born out of the playfully creative vibrations (spanda) emanating from Shiva, the supreme being (the literal meaning of the Sanskrit word 'Siva', is 'auspicious' or 'benevolent'). This divine creation, therefore has to be appreciated by the senses, comprehended by the faculties and apprehended intuitively, without one becoming too attached to it. Shiva is in it as well as outside it and the biggest goal of human life is to see itself at once as part of this divine play, as well as outside it.

Trika is the method by which one can achieve this goal, because it focuses on creating a harmonious relationship among three things: man, energy and God, and then goes on to suggest three ways to achieve it: Anavopaya, Shaktopaya and Shambhavopaya. Roughly translated, the first means using external aids like logic and other kinds of sense perceptions to

lift the veil that hides the Supreme Being, even though He is ensconced within every living thing. The second means withdrawal within one's own being, meditating, in order to see Him. The third means God's grace, which enables one to see Him without any effort at all, that is, being, instead of becoming, which happens only rarely.

In this context the following Sufi quote is helpful: 'Verily we are for God and verily unto him we are returning'. The Sufis liken infinity to an ocean and the Sufi's vocation is to discipline oneself to plunge into, rather to drown in it, so that he is drawn back into the source from which he came. Love for God and all His creations, including themselves, therefore, is for them the most direct path to God. Their creed implies total dedication. On the one hand, they believe in love, but on the other, there is a constant need to wage war against the soul while it refuses to submit to the intense discipline required to follow the path. This may seem like a paradox, but it is not so to the Sufi. The way of love presupposes the presence of its opposite and hence the constant battle with it. This co-existence, as it were, within and without the world, is what brings the Saiva yogi and the Sufi closest to each other.

The interface between the Sufis and the Kashmiris, used to yogis, must, therefore, have been rewarding to both. With their exemplary behaviour, sincerity and firmness of faith, their belief in a doctrine of equality of all human beings, the message of the new arrivals must have struck home. The Kashmiris were now face-to-face with a new choice of beliefs. There was much that was similar between the new and the old faith, though outwardly the two seemed to be in conflict, having sprung from distant soils. A spiritual orientation with an earnest desire to know and become a part of the ultimate reality, with a readiness to go to any length in attaining this goal, were some of the common attributes of Saivism as practised in Kashmir and Sufi Islam. Thus, a fusion of faiths took place and it was from this fusion that the Rishi order of Kashmir was born.

Sheikh Nuruddin Wali, whom the Kashmiris call Nund Rishi, founded a spiritual brotherhood in the beginning of the fifteenth century. Apart from the spiritual, moral and ethical influence it had on the people, this peculiarly Kashmiri order of Rishis enriched the stream of mystic poetry in Kashmiri, which continues to flow uninterrupted to this day, from Nund Rishi through Shamas Faqir (1843– 1901), Samad Mir (1894–1959) and others down to

Bimla Raina (born 1947). There is striking similarity of thought between Lalded and her younger contemporary, Sheikh Nuruddin, whose gentle voice is also a constant reminder to the Kashmiri of the need for temperance, humility and submission. Popularly known as Nund Rishi, this patron saint of Kashmir, is the founder of the Kashmiri order of saints known as the Rishis.

A variation on the newly arrived Sufi theme, this order of Muslim Rishis was deeply influenced by the indigenous faiths of Kashmir, Buddhism and Saivism. Of course, one can trace these influences in Lalded's life and work too. Characterized by meditative practices and strict penance, the way of life of the Rishis was a lesson in austerity. Going a step ahead of the Saivites, they ate the simplest of food, their vegetarianism going to the extent of even refusing to eat cultivated vegetables. Their very name is a Sanskrit word, meaning a sage. Like the Rishis of ancient India, they lived away from civilization in the forests and mountains and subsisted only on roots and wild plants and leaves. These would be dried for winter use. The emphasis on non-violence and following the path of moderation is also suggestive of their Buddhist past, apparently still a part of the collective consciousness of the Kashmiris at that time.

At his birth, Nundh Rishi, according to legend, was so spiritually oriented and so disinclined towards things material, that he did not accept his mother's breast, to her great distress. Lalded is believed to have arrived at the scene, and even though realizing at once that the new baby was no ordinary person, she chided him for refusing to suckle. She asked him to forget about his spiritual needs for the time being and do his duty of keeping his body in health by following the normal ways of humans since he was born as one. Her words are supposed to have been: *Zena mandachhokh nu tu chana chhukh mandachhan; when not ashamed of being born in this world, why be ashamed of feeding?* The baby started to suck forthwith, it is believed.

There are several stories about the philosophical discussions that Lalded, Nund Reshi and Syed Ali Hamadani had with one another, clarifying doubts, and illuminating the dark corners of understanding. But there is no credible evidence to support this. Lalded definitely died before 1391 when Nund Rishi could not have been more than fourteen. He was, however, aware of her mystic greatness and paid tribute to her thus:

*Tami Padmanporuchi Lale Yemi Amrit peevo gali gale So saeni Avataar
Lale Suy me var ditto Deevo!*

(That Lal of Padmaanpore Who drank nectar, sip by sip That avatar of ours,
surely Grant me that same boon, Oh Lord!)

Lalded appeared on the scene at an interesting juncture in the history of ideas in Kashmir and her life and work had a lot to do with the fusion that has given a distinct identity to the Kashmiris' religious practices, whether Hindu or Muslim. Hence the desire of both the communities to claim her as their very own. To the old Hindu faith she is a symbol of resistance to the new Islam while to the new one that of conquest of the old.

Lalded was born in the second decade of the fourteenth century—the exact year of her birth is not known—in a Kashmiri Pandit (Brahmin) family in modern Pandrethan, a village in the suburbs of Srinagar. Her early life was no different from that of any other girl of that time. Before being married off at an early age (as was the custom in her community), into a family in nearby Pampore, then known as Padmanpore, she seems to have been given some education in religious texts by the family priest, Siddha Srikanth, who has been identified as a learned scholar and Saiva yogic practitioner. He is the guru to whom she frequently refers in her verses, sometimes asking him questions, even playfully pointing out his inadequacies as a spiritual mentor.

The marriage, as with most marriages where the woman dares to steer an independent course, was doomed from the very beginning. The couple was ill-matched. The husband had none of the sensibility or subtlety of mind to appreciate Lalded's deeper expectations from life. Besides, the mother-in-law was an oppressive, hostile presence, unable to understand that even though performing all the duties of a traditional daughter-in-law, Lalded's concerns lay beyond those of a mere householder and that she lived and thought on a higher plane. The mother-in-law would miss no opportunity to find something to complain about in her behaviour. Lalded was thus a double victim—of an inimical mother-in-law and a jealous husband. There are innumerable stories of how cruelly she was tormented and the Kashmiri language is full of proverbs connected with Lalded's legendary patience, wisdom, deep insights and spiritual power. They suggest her growing away from accepting prevailing norms to interrogating and rejecting them.

The best-known story of her life underscores the patience with which she put up with the cruelty of her mother-in-law, who used to almost starve her. She would place a large stone in her plate and then cover it up with a thin layer of rice, making it appear as if the plate had a mound of food in it. Lal never complained and the secret of the stone would perhaps never have come out but for the news of a celebration in her house leaking out. The women whom she met at the riverside when they all came to fetch water the next morning, teased her about the festive meal she must have enjoyed the previous day, prompting her to spontaneously burst out, '*hond marytan ya kath, Lali nilavath tsali na zanh*' (whether they slaughter a lamb or sheep, for Lal there is never anything but the stone). That is how the father-in-law came to know about her going hungry and was perhaps able to do something about it.

The saga of silent suffering that was Lalded's early married life has also spawned other legends. One story says that she possessed exceptional skill on the spinning wheel, spinning unimaginably fine pashmina yarn, but it still did not win the approval of her mother-in-law. She took one look at her work and threw it all in the river, where lo and behold, the spun yarn was fine enough to become the gossamer threads of the lotus stalk.

Another legend tells of how once the husband, his suspicions regarding his wife's fidelity having been instigated by his mother, followed her to the riverside where she used to go very early in the morning to sit in communion with Siva before fetching water from the river. He saw nothing suspicious, just her carrying a pitcher of water on her head. Frustrated at not having been able to catch her in some misdemeanor, he threw a stone at her pitcher, which broke into pieces but not a drop of water was spilt—it held its shape even though the container was gone. And Lalded spoke not a word in explanation or reproach, such was her fortitude and self-control. She went home calmly and filled the pots. What was left of the water she threw in the yard, where it turned into a spring, known to this day as Lal Trag—Lal's spring.

It is believed that Lalded, after she left home in a final break with material ties, went about unclothed. This suggests that the life of the spirit rather than that of the flesh became real for her. It was not out of a desire to shock, nor in a mood for self-mortification, nor even as a form of self-flagellation in the manner of the medieval women Christian saints, that she

exposed herself to the elements. It is just that in her ‘fine madness’, she seems to have become completely unselfconscious, almost unaware of her body. She was thus happily, effortlessly able also to transcend the self-consciousness of being a woman that occupies so much of the mental space of women intellectuals, thinkers and writers today. She refused to be bothered by what the world would say when she went about naked. When she was asked whether she felt no shame at showing her body to all the men around her, she asked whether there was a man around. To her the ordinary mass of people was no better than sheep or other dumb animals. This story is similar to that of Mirabai, whom Tulsidas is supposed to have refused to meet because he only met men and not women. Mirabai is believed to have asked who, apart from the Lord, could be called a real man.

The two following vaakhs are illustrative:

The guru gave me but one word of wisdom— From the outside bade me
turn within— That word for me, Lal, is the surest prophecy And that is
why I dance in naked abandon.

Abuse and spit I wore like a crown Slander followed or preceded my steps
But Lal I am, never swerved from my goal— Suffused with God,
where’s the room for these?

The confidence that these words exude is not only a self-satisfaction, but real faith in her own worthiness as an instrument of the Supreme Being. In the first vaakh, Lal is condensing in a few telling phrases an important tenet of her philosophy of life: the need to go beyond the apparent to the underlying truth of reality. One’s gaze, she seems to say, must transcend the exterior, which alone is revealed by the physical senses, and go even beyond what our mental faculties reveal, in order to find and see the spirit in its real truth, in its ‘nakedness’. Here Lalded is also referring to one of the basic principles of Kashmir Saivism, that of the twin aspects of the Supreme Being, the immanent and the transcendental. He is within every human being even while having an aspect beyond us. No wonder then that having understood this concept, Lalded should find herself suffused with His presence and thus unruffled by public opinion. Some modern apologists for propriety prefer to read the last line of the first vaakh differently. Some interpret the word ‘nangay’ (naked) as the name of a flower and some read

it as 'nahangay' (without reason). But both these readings rob the word of its power and are not a satisfactory interpretation.

Lalded's dance is an act of abandoning herself to her Lord's grace, much like Mira Bai did. And just as calumny and criticism never ruffled Mira Bai's purpose, so they made not a dent in Lal's iron resolve and faith. Her 'dance' is not a purposeless wandering as some Kashmiri critics apologetically suggest, but it was a real dance of joy, a celebration of her love for God in which there was no shame.

There is another story about her, which is useful in this context. Once, perhaps to save the energies of all those tongues constantly wagging at her nudity, she borrowed from the shopkeeper two lengths of cloth to drape over her shoulders. During the course of the day, whenever she was greeted with reverence, she tied a knot in the cloth on her right shoulder and when she met with abuse, the one on the left acquired a knot. At the end of the day, both the cloths were 'heavily' knotted, yet when she went back to the shopkeeper and asked him to weigh them, both had the same weight. Good opinion or bad, nothing had any substance, she seemed to suggest.

It is believed that the only time she felt the need to clothe herself was when, in her wanderings, she came face to face with Sayyed Ali Hamadani, who had come to Kashmir from his native Hamadan, along with seven hundred disciples. She felt that he was the only personage whom she could call a man. She is supposed to have rushed to a grocer's shop to hide her nakedness, but he shut her out. So she went to the baker's instead and leapt into his raging hearth, from where she emerged unharmed, dressed in golden or some say green, robes. This might be an allegory suggesting not self-immolation, but burning away of dross.

Another story is illustrative of her sense of humour in driving her point home. Once she saw a Brahmin bathing ritually, chanting loud mantras and covering himself with sandal and saffron paste while indulging at other times in all sorts of abusive and inhuman behaviour. At this she grabbed a pot and after filling it with shit and rubbish, began to thoroughly cleanse its exterior and decorate it with reverence. Watching her do this, the Brahmin understood the import of her actions and learnt a lesson.

Many of these stories may be apocryphal, but they have had a powerful hold on popular imagination through centuries of telling. Besides, Lalded is like a patron saint to the Kashmiris and all stories that grow around her

allow us to understand how folk or popular culture understood the saint. In focusing on her legacy as a woman writer, it is vital to comprehend the times she lived in and the experiences that gave birth to her thought processes.

Even Lalded's proverbial patience must have given way sometimes, particularly when confronted with stupidity. When she saw something patently absurd and yet people being moved by it, she could not but exclaim with contempt:

I could learn to disperse the southern clouds I could learn to drain the sea I
could learn to heal a leper's sores But I could never learn to teach a fool.

It must have been the accumulation of several of these unpleasant encounters with the material world that finally drove Lalded out of the folds of conventional behaviour to freely follow the spirit and seek and find encounters of a different kind.

She herself went through profound mystical experiences, passed through a furnace as the Sufi would say, and only then succeeded in destroying the dross in her character to find that everyone is a part of the divinity they seek elsewhere. The fact that all her words come from profound experience is the secret of her authoritative voice. Like Kabir, she too had no patience with meaningless ritual and hypocrisy. She minces no words:

Your idol is stone, the temple a stone too— All a stone bound together from
top to toe What is it you worship, you dense Brahmin?
Bind the airs of the breath to the mind.

One is reminded of the impatience with meaningless gestures and empty symbols that prompted Kabir, who came much later, to say:

*Paahan puje hari mile To main poojoon pahar Taa se to chaaki bhali Pees
khaaye sansaar.*

If God were found in worship of stone I would fain worship the mountain
Or far better, worship the grindstone Whose action feeds the world.

In its forceful condemnation of a self-delusion where the symbol appears more important than the substance, Kabir's verse repeats Lal's thought and feelings, using a similar metaphor. But Kabir's simple, pragmatic wisdom is based on common sense, while Lalded's exhortation is subtler and the Brahminic influence on her vocabulary is denser than the folk idiom in Kabir's verse. But many of her vaakhs are replete with folk idioms and

domestic metaphors. Here she asks one to join the ‘vital airs’ that emanate from the heart with the disciplined wisdom of the mind and thus evolve into a higher being whose emotional, intellectual and spiritual faculties, finally balanced, are in perfect harmony with one another. These lines point to a much more honed poetic skill. The superbly condensed phrase, ‘*manas tu pavanas sangaath*’—literally ‘the mind and air bound together’ suggests the ideal to which all mystics aspire: the union of all faculties in one harmonious whole.

Lalded’s most significant contribution is to have brought the difficult Saiva philosophy out from the cubicles of the Sanskrit-knowing scholars into the wide, open spaces of the Kashmiri-knowing people. In the process of translating its highly evolved, in fact highly subtle concepts and her personal mystic experiences into the language of the masses, she not only made these accessible to them, but also enriched the Kashmiri language. The mystic’s dilemma of how to communicate the uncommunicable personal vision, seems to have been effortlessly resolved by her through the use of common idioms, images and metaphors to which people could easily relate. Here she uses a metaphor from the blacksmith’s forge to explain a subtle yogic practice:

I squeezed the bellows, stifled its breath In the small flame I stood revealed
I let the inner light burst forth In the dark I found him and wouldn’t let go.

An interesting point to note here is the agency of the poet—using the acting ‘I’—which causes *her* inner light to illuminate Him.

Lalded is not the gatekeeper of Bramanical philosophy that marks the difference between the ‘initiated’ and the ‘uninitiated’, but a mystic who interrogates and rejects elite distinctions. She does not believe in withholding secrets, she would much rather share what she has practised and achieved. She chooses images and metaphors from common scenes, from the household to the marketplace, from the chores and skills of the ordinary artisan or craftsman to which they could easily relate, to reach out to people. The medium of the mothertongue and the use of the easily recitable verse form of the *vaakh*, made her utterances pass into common parlance and secured for them a place in collective memory.

What gives her words authority even though as a woman she might have lacked it in that society and time, is that she has a personal experience, a

direct relationship with Shiva without the aid of an intermediary male figure. In this, we can compare her to the mediaeval Christian women mystics once again. For them too the only way to validate their words, and to get out of the all pervasive, constricting presence of male authority, was this claim of a personal relationship with God. After all, it was from God Himself that all the authority of the church, all of whose top functionaries were male, was drawn. These women were thus able to establish some authority of their own. We can say that in this 'confession' they did not need a 'confessor', they could be alone.

The sophistication of philosophical thought is made accessible through the use of lucidity of language:

Siva is everywhere, know him as the sun
Know the Hindu no different to
the Muslim
If you are wise, know yourself
That's the way to know the
saheb.

There is an interesting play upon the word 'zaan' (to know), analysing its meaning at various levels, from the everyday interaction, almost the lowest level of consciousness, to the highest. How do we get to know Shiva? The verse prompts us to ask this primal question, and then proceeds to supply the answer. At the commonest and obvious level, it means the ability to see the sun, something that it is clear as daylight and that almost everyone can comprehend. The second line goes up to a higher level of knowing, i.e., discernment, the ability to understand the essential non-difference between Hindus and Muslims. The third line raises the level of understanding still higher, asking the listener to look squarely at something most of us are unable to see, our own self, and then to see it as one ray of that very light of the sun, as a part of that glorious supreme light which pervades the whole universe. Such understanding alone will bestow upon us the title of a wise or true Trikaite, a real adept in Kashmir Shaiva practices. This is certainly the toughest test of our understanding. Only after passing it can we claim to have found what the poet has sought: God realization and the real meaning of life.

The verse is steeped in Shaiva mysticism, which did not differentiate between castes and creeds or religions. The way to a realization of God was open to anyone who sought in the right spirit, accepting the presence of the Supreme Being in every living thing. The world with its variety and fecundity is His creation and therefore not to be denied, rather to be relished

with our senses. But of course, the senses have to act as one's servants, not masters. 'Temperance' is the key:

Eat temperate and you'll be temperate, dear All doors open to the temperate

Wear just enough to keep out the cold Eat just enough to subdue your hunger.

She addresses us just as a mother would, using endearments.

The mystic's quest and yearning is vividly expressed in evocative imagery, which points to her great strength as a poet:

With strands untwisted I tow my boat I wish He'd hear and pull me over

Water seeps through my unbaked bowls O how my heart longs to go home!

For the Trika practitioner, the destination is within one's own self, but how many miles have to be traversed before it can be found, how many veils removed before one has a vision of eternity, where 'the burden of the mystery' is lightened. Lalded, humbly denying any power of her own, surrenders to the lord's grace (the Shambhovapaya of Trikashastra). She admits her lack of skill, the inadequacies of her tools and, adrift in the turbulent sea of unresolved enigmas, hopes and prays for divine aid to help her 'go home'—in other words, to find the centre of her being.

Sometimes she cannot wait for the guru to respond to her questions, and she finds the answer herself. The following two vaakhs are illustrative:

O teacher for me you are the lord You know the inner self, tell me, do

When all breath rises from the body's centre How is 'hoo' so cold and 'haa' so hot?

The body's centre is the fiery sun The head's crown the icy moon From where waters gently flow So 'hoo' is cold and 'haa' is hot.

It is a child-like question, curiosity about something that apparently does not make sense: Why should the same breath have contradictory effects when blown out sharply with pursed lips and when exhaled forcefully with mouth open?

The second verse is a succinct explanation of the system of Yoga practised by Lalded. It believes that in the region of the navel is seated the 'bulb' i.e., the root of the 'nadis' (tubes) through which 'prana' (life air) circulates. Hence Lalded calls it 'kandapura' (the region of the bulb). It is the area that is known in human anatomy as the solar plexus. It is so named

because the radial network of nerves and ganglia situated behind the stomach and supplying the organs here resemble the rays of the sun. For Lal ded too this region is hot. But with practice, a yogi can rouse the coiled energy lying at the base of the spine, kundalini, and lead it up through various levels in the spinal cord to the cool 'thousand petalled lotus' situated at the crown of the head. This is the blissful state of cosmic consciousness, where all hot agitations of mind and body are stilled. No wonder then, that breath should take upon itself the cooling and warming properties of the body, which after all, is sustained by it.

It is the urge to 'know' and to find answers to primal and even ordinary puzzles, demystifying esoteric truths and practices that is a strong motif of her poetry.

Love in its various forms is the dominant theme in all mystic poetry. Lal ded deals with it in this way:

At the sinking of the moon I made Him speak Nightlong the agony of
separation I had borne My beloved was roused with the chant of Lal, Lal
Union with him cleansed my body and mind.

The noticeable feature of this verse about the mystic's union with the beloved is that through the long, dark night of the soul's painful quest, Lal has chanted her own name, like a mantra. And it is this that has worked the miracle—the elusive Lord has been found. Here is supreme confidence in her own self and its ability to reach the desired goal, another instance of assertion of self and dispensing with the idea of the Guru, the male authority. The intense pain has been overcome and her 'mad' self has finally found clear, articulate, utterance. The dichotomy of a duality has also been resolved in the realization that she and the Lord are one entity. There is no need for rituals.

Through all of Lal ded's work shines a remarkable honesty and fearlessness in calling a spade a spade. She makes no extravagant claim about her own mystic achievements, but at the same time she cannot let pretense and chicanery on the part of so-called godmen pass. One marvels at the strength and firmness of purpose evident in her plain-speaking approach to problems of the most complicated metaphysical kind. She is totally free from the insecurity and bashfulness associated with a woman daring to speak in a world dominated by men teachers and seers. What she has to say about the 'miracles' performed by charlatans in the guise of

saints, merely to impress and gather a following after them, in her own time, is applicable to similar practitioners today:

Still the waters or quench a fire Create an illusion of false flight Draw milk
from a wooden cow In the end it's deceit. It is fraud.

Lalded was born in a Hindu tradition, in the sense that most of her allusions and references are to the mythology of that religion. One of these is regarding the nature of the universe. Even though deeply influenced by Islamic thought, particularly in rejecting idol worship as an end in itself, she believed in the transmigration of the soul. And what is more, she remembers her earlier births. Not only has she herself passed through several guises in her different incarnations, she also describes the cycles the world has gone through:

Thrice the lake overflowed its banks, I remember And once the lake did rise
to the sky One lake it was from the Harmukh to the Kaunsar And seven
times the void swallowed the lake.

Lalded is far above idol worship, yet she is fascinated by forms and shapes and symbolic representations, as all artists are. She thinks of God in abstract terms, naming His attributes as pure sound, pure form—the 'naad' (sound) and the 'bindu' (the primal dot). But, for the Trikaitees as well as the Tantriks, there are symbols of Shakti and Shiva respectively, so there is no escaping from symbolism:

The unimpaired sound, the void of the sky The one with no name nor
family nor caste Just the Self-aware sound and the Dot eternal That God
alone will mount this horse.

This verse is a beautiful, graphic representations of the written and the spoken word, so important a tool for the poet. The 'sound' in the first line is the mystic symbol Om, which when written down must carry the shape of the crescent and the dot to represent Shakti and Shiva on its back.

Before Lalded appeared on the scene, most serious literary work was done in Sanskrit in Kashmir. Somewhat hesitant attempts to use Kashmiri had been made earlier, but the language was still in a formative stage. The first extant work in Kashmiri is *Mahanaya Prakash* by one Shitikanth, who is sometimes mistakenly thought of as Lalded's guru. It is a treatise on certain Tantrik and Saiva practices, but the language is a mixture of elementary Kashmiri, Prakrit and some other dialects. It is only in Lalded's hands that the Kashmiri language came into its own by her 'domesticating'

and rendering accessible in the common language, the philosophical abstractions of Sanskrit-using Brahmins. She proved that the language was equal to articulate the soaring imagination and profundity of thought that she possessed. She is comparable to Shakespeare in creating a literature that enriched her native tongue. She found words to express everything, whether it is the day-to-day activities of tradespeople, menial tasks of labourers, chores of housewives, games that children play, or highly evolved intellectual experiences and the most elusive mystic experiences. The language is rich with a wealth of vocabulary, allusions and suggestive power. Most proverbs and maxims that are in use today are a gift from Lal Ded as it was she who created these terse one-liners that are the pride of the verbal skill of Kashmiris today. The following vaakhs are illustrative:

All you did was stretch your own skin taut and peg it down
What had you sown to expect a bumper harvest?

Preaching to a fool is pelting a rock with marbles
Fruitless as feeding a bull with jaggery sweet!

For my wooden bow, a rush for an arrow
An unskilled carpenter for a royal metropolis
In the marketplace, a shop unguarded
A body uncleansed by pilgrimage, who can tell my plight.

The string of metaphors to describe the plight of someone whose plans and ideas are too powerful for the tools for action she is equipped with, is vivid. All these are images with which even the unlettered can easily relate, as they are taken from within the ambit of ordinary life. Their meaning can be understood and appreciated differently by people from different levels of intellectual development. For the mystically oriented, of course, they unfold a much higher message, that of the inadequate tools of a soul in search of God realization. In this lyrical expression of frustration at the inability to reach the spiritual goal, Lal Ded reaches out to those who are in the same plight for various reasons.

Or let us look at the following two vaakhs, which have to be read together. In these the metaphor of cotton, its weaving and fashioning into garments, popular with the later Bhakti poets like Kabir, in order to describe the stages a soul goes through in its worldly journey, dressed in the garb of a human body, is worked out in sharp detail:

I, Lal, set out, hoping to bloom like a cotton flower But was beaten and trampled by ginner and carder Shredded and spun into so fine a yarn And hung and hit by the weaver on his loom Thrashed and kneaded on the washerman's stone Pasted and plastered with soap and clayey earth Till the tailor's skilful scissors worked on my limbs And I found my place in the highest abode.

Literally a chronicle of the buffets of life which mould and shape a personality, these vaakhs work out the metaphor chosen, in the idiom of the common man. The eye for detail in describing all the stages of the operation of making a garment out of cotton is interesting in a mystic. This is no voice of a mystic who only lives in ethereal realms of the spirit, alienated from the ordinary life around her. Here is someone who sees, notices and appreciates the role of everyone in society, no matter how lowly. She must have felt as one among the people involved in the job, right from the peasant who reaped the cotton crop, to the skilled artisans like the weaver and the tailor. The usefulness of everyone in this saga of creating is duly acknowledged while tracing the journey of a fluff of cottonwool from the stage when it emerged from the safe cocoon of the closed seed to the final one when it is fashioned into clothing. It seems thus to have realized its full potential, that of serving a useful purpose, but in the process the tension between nature and culture—the cotton flower and the fashioned garment—is also brought out. That is how Lal sees the journey of a soul in this material world, clad in the human form, to reach its final destination: becoming once again a part of the universal spirit.

The two vaakhs below demand notice for the sheer sweep of the imagination that articulates them. She is suggesting, through her images, the marvellous variety of creation that is dazzling in its possibilities. She also creates here, an awareness of transience and mutability, moving, in a strange analogy, from images of nature into Hindu mythology in a reference to different incarnations:

It was but now I saw a river in spate And now there's no bridge nor ferry It was but now that I saw a bush in bloom And now there's no flower nor thorn.

It was but now I saw a hearth ablaze And now there is no smoke nor fire It was but now I saw her as the Pandavas' mother And now she is merely a

potter's aunt!

The material world is in a state of flux, perpetually in motion and nothing remains the same. Every moment, a new fact of the myriad shapes it can assume flashes before our eyes. A person who might have been high born and important in one incarnation, can very well appear as someone hardly worth our notice in another. So what is reality, one might ask? Reality is this game of hide and seek that Siva plays in his divine, eternal playfulness, Lalded seems to say. While describing these unpredictable contrasts and interesting role reversals, she shows a delightful sense of humour too—the Pandavas' mother turning into a potter's aunt!

In another vaakh she mocks at the insensitivity of people through telling images that have a sensuous power:

A yawning pit at your feet, and you dance?

How, my dear, do you reconcile the two?

Your amassed possessions will all remain here Tell me, dear, how you relish your food?

Here Lal is at her simplest best, addressing the individual directly. She advocates the ideal of moderation, neither total abstention, nor over-indulgence. It is vaakhs like this one that have passed into the common Kashmiri ethical and moral code. But the more important point to note in literary terms is the 'domesticity' of the metaphor: the Brahminism of the idea is being rewritten into a domestic idiom—food—which is a characteristic proto-feminism. This is how the disempowered gave themselves power:

The vast plain of the Void I crossed alone I, Lal left reason and memory behind
Communing with myself, I found myself Among what reeds my
lotus bloomed.

The vaakh ends on a perfect little metaphor. The sweep of the endless plain and a solitary pilgrim is a very powerful image. Then there is the dialogue with herself in which the whole baggage of commitments, memories and demands of reason and relationships is shed and the commitment is only to her own self. So many reeds in the stagnant waters and in contrast to them, the lotus, blooming gloriously in solitary splendour that is the essence of Lalded, as is the skill to nearly arrange such wealth of thought and feeling in the confined space of a four-line vaakh.

Again, in the following verse, one sees the powerful imagination—that traverses time and space effortlessly—and skill of an accomplished poet at work in describing the all-pervasive presence of the Lord. In these lines she is at her visionary best:

Through the ten directions I raced and came home Fleeing, I pierced the
void and the wind And I found Siva present everywhere Closed the three
and six and He appeared, Immanent.

Lalded suggests that she was able to go beyond the material world and have a vision of Paramashiva Himself. The *vaakh* abounds in alliteration, which unfortunately cannot be seen in the English translation. But if the original is read, the various repetitive sounds create a music of their own. The soft ‘d’ of the first line, the harsh ‘tsa’ of the second, the sibilant ‘sh’ of the third and fourth and the soft ‘t’ of the fourth line prove Lalded’s skill is making use of poetic device to heighten the power of her words.

The vivid imagery of the following *vaakhs* illustrates her poetic skill further:

Who can stop the icicles dripping in winter?

Who can hold the wind in his fist?

He who can hold in and crush the senses five He is the one to hold the sun
in the midst of darkness.

The simile in the following *vaakh* could only come from the imagination and keen eye of a great poet:

Fame and name are like water in a basket.

He who can hold the wind in his fist Or tether an elephant with a single hair
He alone will fulfilled be.

Lalded alone could make poetry out of a mystic revelation:

With a cleansed mind, I, Lal entered the garden And saw Shiva and Shakti
in embrace, Oh bliss!

Then I became one with the lake of nectar While living I died, who can
harm me now?

Let us now take a look at the mechanics of the verse form she used, the *vaakh*. When written down, it consists of four lines, each of which is a loose tetrametre. The first syllable is stressed and then the stress falls alternately, the last syllable being generally unstressed. In fact, after beginning with authority, the end of the line is like a fade out, but this does not jar, the soft touch at the end soothes the ear and makes the message go down even more

easily to the uninitiated. The gravity of tone suits the seriousness of the message conveyed. Roop Bhawani used the same metre later in the seventeenth century, finding it most suitable for her mystic utterances. Besides, Roop Bhawani called Lalded her guru, acknowledged her debt both in the content and form of her poetry, therefore her choice of this stanza form is quite appropriate. The gentle cadence of these solemn numbers is like a warm, comforting breath of air on cold night. But at the same time, this medium—slow moving and thereby allowing the thought to develop and come to a resolution in the four lines of the stanza—is well able to convey, in a finely condensed way, the subtle, sometimes elusive thought processes involved in a mystic experience. And the great advantage of the rhythm of this form of verse is that it makes the verses easily recitable, which is one of the reasons for the survival of these works in an oral tradition through unlettered ages. Whether Lalded herself forgot this metre or it was already in existence and her words naturally fell into its musical mode is difficult to know but in Kashmiri, it was certainly she who first honed and fine-tuned it to serve as her voice.

We must consider ourselves privileged to have been allowed by Lalded to share her mystic experiences in words of such uncommon beauty and ability to move—a double privilege indeed. There is no art of the poet, whether from the east or the west that is not known to her, Her imagination is tempered by a down-to-earth practicality, so that no matter what rarified regions it soars to, it never loses touch with a poet's art in her search for the right medium and finding it, tempers it to suit her purpose .

1. *Goran vonunam kunuy vatsun*
nebra dopnam ander atsun
suy me lali gav vaakh tu vatsun
tavay hetum nangay natsun.

My teacher gave me a word of wisdom
From outside bade me turn within
That word for me is the final word
Lal dances now in naked abandon.

2. *Lyakh tu thokh petha sheri hetsum
Nyanda sapnem path brontha taani
Lal chhas kal zanh nu thsenim
Ada yeli sapnis weype kyaah?*

Their abuse and spit I wore like a crown
Slander dogged my every step
But I am Lal, I stayed unmoved
Full I am, where's room for more?

3. *Deev vatta divar vatta
Petha bon chhuy ikavaath
Pooz kas karakh hutta Batta
kar manas tu pavanash sangaath.*

Your idol's stone, your temple's stone
All's stone tied from top to toe
Dense Brahmin, what is it you worship?
Bind breath to mind instead.

4. *Shiva chhuy thali thali rav zaan
Mov zaan Heund ta Musalman
Trukay chhukh ta panun paan prazanaav
Soy chhay Sahebas suti zainezaan.*

Siva is everywhere, know Him as the sun
Know the Hindu no different to the Muslim
If you are wise, know yourself
That's the way to know the saheb.

5. *Somuy khe maali, somuy aasakh
Somuy khena mutsuranay baran taari
Yava taer tsali tim amber heta
Kheud yava gali tim aahar an.*

Eat temperate and you'll be temperate, dear
All doors open to the temperate

Wear just enough to keep out the cold
Eat just enough to subdue your hunger .

6. *Zanam praavith wobuv na thsondum*
Looban boogan baram na pray
Somuy aahaar setha zonum
Tsolum dwokh vaav, polum Dai.

Born into this world I sought no wealth
Was not in love with pleasure and greed
Moderate food was enough for me
Suffered storms of sorrow, I stayed with God.

7. *Aami pana sodras naav chhas lamaan*
Kati bozi Dai myon meti diyi taar
Aamen taaken poni chhum shramaan
Dil chhum bramaan gara gathsaha.

With strands untwisted I tow my boat
I wish He'd hear and pull me over
Water seeps through my unbaked bowls
O how my heart longs to go home!

8. *Damadam kormas damanhaale*
Prazalyom deeph ta naneyam zaath.
Andaryum prakash nebar thsotum
Gati manza rotum ta karmas thaph.

I squeezed the bellows, stifled its breath
In the small flame I stood revealed
I let the inner light burst forth
In the dark I found Him and wouldn't let go.

9. *He gwara pameswara*
Baavtam tseyi chhuy antar vyod

*Doshvay wopdaan kandapura
Hoo kava turun ta haa kava totuy.*

O teacher for me you are the lord
You know the inner self, tell me, do
When all breath rises from the body's centre
How is 'hoo' so cold and 'haa' so hot?

10. *Nabhisthanas chhe prakarath zalavuni
Bramasthanas shishurun mwokh
Bramandas peth nad vuhuvuni
'Phoo' tavay turun 'haa' gav twot.*

The body's centre is the fiery sun
The head's crown the icy moon
From where waters gently flow
So 'hoo' is cold and 'haa' is hot .

11. *Gwaras prithsyaam saasi latte
Yas na kenh vanaan tas kyah naav
Prithsaan prithsaan thachis ta loosas
Kenh nasa nishi kyahtaam draav.*

A thousand times I asked my teacher
How do you give nothing a name?
I asked in vain, exhausted, sunk
Till out of nothing something came.

12. *Lalith lalith vaday bo vaay
Tseta muhich peyiy maay
Roziy na pata loha langruchi thsaay
Niz swaroop kya mothuy haay.*

Gently I will weep, my soul
For it is the world you love
Not even shadows of your things will last
How could you forget your own self ?

13. *Naabadi baaras atagand dyol gom*
Dih kaan hol gom, heka kaho
Gwor sund vatsun raavantyol pyom
Pahali ros khyol gom, heka kaho.

The load of sugar on my back is loosened
My body's a bent like a bow, how do I bear it?
My teacher's words hurt like a weeping blister
I'm a flock without a shepherd, how do I bear it?

14. *Tseth novuy tsandram novuy*
Zalmay dyunthum navam novey
Yana petha lali me tanaman novum
Tana lal bo navam navai chhas.

My mind's new, the moon is new
All in this world's ocean I see as new
Since I washed my body and my self
I, Lal, am forever renewed.

15. *Lal bo drayas lalore*
Thsandaan loosum dyan keho raath
Vuchhum panditha panani gare
Suy me rotmas nechhithar ta saath.

Driven by love I, Lal, rushed out
Searched till the end of night and day
But I found the wise one in my own house
I grabbed that perfect moment – propitious my stars !

16. *Tsaamar chhatar rath simhaasan*
Hlaad naatya ras tula prakh
Kyah maanith yeti aasvun
Kava zan kaasiy marnani shankh.

Royal flywhisk, sunshade, chariot, throne
Gaiety, joys of theatre, bed of softest down
Which of these do you think will last?
How will you conquer the fear of death?

17. *Karam za kaaran tre kombith*
Yava labakh parlookas ankh
Woth khas mandalas tsombith
Tavay tsali maranyin shankh.

Give up the two Karmas and causes three
And you'll gain insight into the higher world
Arise, ascend, tear through the sun's orb
And you will conquer the fear of death

18. *Gyanuki ambar paarith tane*
Yim pad Lali dapy tim hradi ankh
Kaaruni pranaavaki lay kor lale
Tseth joti kosun marmuni shankh.

Dressed in robes of consciousness
Her heart engraved with words she spoke
Chanting Om, Lal merged with the light
And conquered the fear of death.

19. *Charman tsatith puni paanas*
Tyuth kya vavyoth phalihi sov
Mudas vwopdish gay rinzi dumatas
Kani dandas gor aaprith rov.

All you did was stretch your own skin taut, peg it down
What had you sown to expect a bounteous harvest?
Preaching to a fool is pelting marbles at a rock
Fruitless as feeding jaggery to a bull.

20. *Hachvi haerinji petsiv kaan gom*
Abwokh chhaan pyom yath razdaane
Manzbaag baazras kuluph ros vaan gom
Teertha ros paan gom, kus maali zaane.

For my wooden bow, a reed for an arrow
An unskilled carpenter for a royal metropolis
In the marketplace, a shop unguarded
A body uncleansed by pilgrimage. Who can know my plight!

21. *Lal ba drayas kapas poshi satsuy*
Katsi tu dooni karnam yatsay lath
Tuy yeli khaernas zaeviji tuye
Vovuri vaana gayum alaenzey lath.

I, Lal, set out hoping to bloom like a cotton flower
But was beaten and trampled by ginner and carder
Shredded and spun into so fine a yarn
Hung and hit by the weaver on his loom.

22. *Dwobi yeli chhaevnas dwobi kani pethay*
Saz ta saaban maathsnam yatsuy
Sutsi yeli phirnam hani hani kaetsuy
Ada Lali me praevum param gath.

Thrashed and kneaded on the washerman's stone
Pasted and plastered with soap and earth
Till the tailor's skilful scissors shaped my limbs
And I found my place in the highest abode .

23. *Dami deenthum nad vahvani*
Dami dyoonthum sum na ta saar
Dami deenthum ther pholuvani
Dami dyoonthum gul na ta khaar.

A moment ago I saw a river in spate
There is no bridge or ferry now

A moment ago I saw a bush in bloom
There is no thorn or flower now.

24. *Dami deenthum gaj dazvani*
Dami dyoonthum duh na ta naar
Dami deenthum Pandavan hunz maeji
Dami deenthum kraji maas.

A moment ago I saw a hearth ablaze
There is no smoke or fire now
A moment ago she was the Pandava's mother
She's merely a potter's aunt now.

25. *Dachhinis obras zaayun zaanaha*
Sodras zaanaha kadith aith
Myondis roogiyas vaidyut zaanha
Mudas zaanim na pravith kath.

I could learn to disperse the southern clouds
I could learn to drain the sea
I could learn to heal a leper's sores
But I could never learn to teach a fool.

26. *Tala chhuy zyus tay petha chhukh natsaan*
vanta maali ketha patsaan chhuy.
soruy sombrith yeti chhuy motsaan
Vanta maali ann kitha rotsaan chhuy.

A yawning pit at your feet, and you dance?
How, my dear, do you reconcile the two?
All you gathered will stay behind
Tell me, dear, how you relish your food?

27. *Shunyuk maadaan kodum paanas*
Me Lali roozum na bwod na hosh

*Vezay sapnis paanay paanas
Ada kami hili phol Lali pamposh.*

I crossed the void's vast plain alone
I Lal, left reason and memory behind
Within myself, I found my self
Among what reeds my lotus bloomed !

28. *Gagan tsuy bhootal tsuy
Tsuy den pavan ta rath
Arg tsandan posh pony tsuy
Tsuy chhukh sakal ta laegizi kyah*

You are sky, you are earth
You are day and air and night
You are sacred water, flowers and sandal
You are everything, What can I offer you?

29. *Asi aasi ta asi aasav
Asiy dor kar patavath
Shivas sori na zyon ta marun
Ravas sori na atagath.*

We're the ones who were, we the ones who live on
Never a time when we were not present
Siva's creations dissolve and rise
Like the sun that rises and sets and rises again.

30. *Athshyam ay ta gathsun gathse
Pakun gathse dyan kyoh raath
Yorey aye toori gathsun gathse
Kenh nata kenh nata kenh nata kyah*

Ceaselessly we come, eternally we must depart
Ever moving day and night
Endlessly back and forth from where we came
A mystery must mean something.

31. *Deeshi aayas dash dishi tsalith*
Talith tsotum shunya ad vaav
Shivay dyunthum shayi shayi meelith
She ta tre tropimas ta Shivay draav.

I raced through the ten directions and came home
I tore through the void and wind
I found Siva everywhere
I closed the three and six and He appeared. Immanent.

32. *Shishiras vuth kus rate*
Kus bwoke rate vaav
Yus paanths yendriyi tselith tsate
Suy rate gate vaav.

Who can stop the icicles dripping in winter?
Who can hold the wind in his fist?
Whose hand can crush the five senses
Is the one who holds the sun in darkness .

33. *Sheel ta maan chhuy pony krenje*
Mochhi yemy rot mali yod vaav
Hos yus masvaal gande
Tee yas tagi tay suy ada nihaal.

Repute and renown are water in a basket
He who's held the wind in his fist
Or tethered an elephant with a single hair
Shall alone be exalted.

34. *Lal bo tsayas swaman bag baras*
Vuchhim Shivas Shakat meelith ta vah
Tuty lay karum amrit saras
Zinday maras ta me kari kyah.

My mind cleansed, I Lal, entered the garden
I saw Siva and Shakti as one – O bliss!
I became one with the lake of nectar
Though living I have died – who can harm me now?

35. *Kyah kara paantsan dahan ta kahan*
Wokhshun yath leji karith yim gay
Saari samahan yath razi lamhan
Ada kyazi raavihe kaahan gaav.

What should I do with the five, the ten, the eleven
Who stirred the pot, scraped it, and left?
Had they pulled the rope together
The eleven would not have lost the cow.

36. *Ha manusha kyazi chhukh vutthaan seki loor*
Ami rukhi ha mali paki na naav
Lyookhuy yi Narani karmani ruche
Ti mali heki na phirith zaanh.

Man, why do you twist sand to rope?
A hold like that can tow no boat
What God has written in your fate
No one can change, my dear.

37. *Aayas ti syoduy gathsa ti syoduy*
Sedis hol me karyam kyah
Bo tas aesus aagray vezuy
Vedis ta vendis karyam kyah.

Straight I came and straight I shall return
The crooked can't lead the straight astray
He knew me from the very beginning
Who can harm those who love and know ?

38. *Maarukh maarabooth kaam krood loob*
Nata kaan burith maarnay paan
Manay khi dikh sovetsar sham
Vishay tihund kyah druv zaan.

Kill the deadly demons, lust, anger, greed
Or with their arrows they'll shoot you dead
Feed them little, rein them in with your good thoughts
And know their substance is but nothing.

39. *Heth karith raaj pherina*
Dith karith trapti na man
Loob vena zeev marina
Zeevant mari tay suy chhuy gyaan.

You have a kingdom and you're still dissatisfied?
You give it away and you're still discontent?
A man does not die when he's free from desire
He's alive in death, that is true knowledge.

40. *pavan poorith yus ani vagi*
Tas bon a suprish na bochhi ta treash
Ti yas karun anti tagi
Samsaaras suy zeyi nechh.

The one who can control breath and mind
Will feel neither hunger nor thirst
The one who can do this until the end
Will enter the world to earn a name.

41. *Moodo kray chhay na daarun ta paarun*
Moodo kray chhay na rachhiny kaay
Moodo kray chhay na deeh sandaarun
Sahaz vetsaarun chhuy vopdesh.

Fool, there's no merit in fasts and rites
No merit in serving your body, fool

No merit, fool, in comforting yourself
Look inward – this is good advice.

42. *Sats sas na saatas pats sas na rumas*
Somas me Lali pananuy vaakh
Andryum gatkar rutith ta volum
Tsatith ta dyutmas tati chaakh.

I did not trust, I did not wait
I drank the wine of my own words
I caught the inner darkness, pulled it down
Ripped it, cut it, tore it to shreds .

43. *Lolaki wohkhala vaalinj pishim*
Kwokal tsajim ta roozas raza
Buzum to zaajim paanas chashim
Karva zaana tava suti mara kina lasa.

In love's mortar I ground up my heart
Evil passions fled and I was at peace
I roasted and burnt it, ate my heart myself
I can no longer tell my life from death.

44. *Shiva va keeshav va zin va*
Kamalaznath naam daarin yiyuh
Me abli kaasitan bavarooz.
Su va su va su va su.

Siva or Keshava or Buddha
Or Brahma the lotus-born He calls himself
Let Him cure me of the sickness of this world
He or he or he or he.

45. *Tsaalun chhu vuzmala ta tratay,*
Tsaalun chuu mandinyan gatakaar

*Tsaalun chuu paan panun kadun gratay
Hete maali santoosh vaatiy paanay.*

Endure you must lightning and cloudbursts
Endure a pall of darkness at noon
Endure the body crushed between grindstones
Be patient, accept – contentment will come.

46. *Zal thamavun hutavah turnaavun
Urdagaman parivarzith chareth
Kaathdevi dwad shramanaavun
Antay sakalay kapat chareth.*

Still the waters or quench a fire
Create an illusion of false flight
Draw milk from a wooden cow
In the end it's deceit. It is fraud.

47. *Anaahat kha soruph shunyalay
Yas naav na varun na guthur na rooph
Aham vimarshi naad binduy yas von
Suy Deev ashva vaara peth chadyas.*

The unhindered sound, the void of space
The one without name or family or caste
Just the self-aware note, the seed of sound
That God alone will mount this horse .

48. *Yimay she tse, timay she me
Shyamagala tse ben loosus
Yihoy benabed tse ta me
Tsa shen saami, bo sheyi mushis.*

The six that you have, I have them too
Blue-throated one, I suffer estranged from you
There's a difference between us
You're master of the six, and I'm enslaved.

49. *Abyasi savikasi layi vothu*
Gaganas sagun myool sami tsrata
Shunya gol tay anaamay motu
Yohoy wopdeesh chhuy batta.

Strive to absorb what's manifest
The world of form will become the void
The void will dissolve, the ineffable stay
Brahmin, learn this truth.

50. *Soyi kal no dwod suti sagize*
Serpini thoolan dizi no phah
Seki shatthas phal no bowize
Ravarizi na kom yajen teel.

Water not the nettles with milk
Do not warm a serpent's eggs
Sow not sandbanks with seed
And waste not oil on cakes of chaff.

51. *Moodas gyanuch kath no vanize.*
kharas gor dina raavi doh.
Yus yuth kare su tyuth swore
Khere karzi na panun paan.

Do not waste wisdom on a fool
Can an ass know the taste of candy?
As a man does, so will he think
Throw not yourself in such a well.

52. *Aras neri na modur sheeray*
Nirveeras neri na shoora naav
Moorkhas pranun chhuy hastis kashun
Yaso maali dandas beha tsaav.

The greengage will not yield juices sweet
The coward will never be known as brave
Counselling a fool is scratching an elephant's hide
Useless as a bull, immobile in sloth .

53. *Kus ha maali loosuy na pakaan pakaan?*
Kus ha maali loosuy na wolgaan sumir?
Kus na maali loosuy na maraan ta zewaan?
Kus ha maali loosuy na karan nenda?

Who tires not though far he travels?
Who tires not though over mountains he soars?
Who tires not with births and deaths?
Who tires not with malicious gossip?

54. *Zal ha maali loosuy na pakaan pakaan*
Siriyi loosuy na wolgan sumir
Tsandram loosuy na maraan ta zewaan
Manushy loosuy na nenda karaan.

Water tires not, though far it travels
The sun tires not, though over mountains it soars
The moon tires not, waxing and waning
Man tires not, maligning others.

55. *Makris mal zan tsolum manas*
Ada labam zanis zaan
Suy yeli dyoonthum nishi paanas.
Soruy su ta ba na kenh

Like grime from a mirror, my mind was wiped clean
And I found true recognition of Him
When I found him so close to me, inseparable
He was everything, nothing I.

56. *Akuy omkar yus nabi dare*
Kumbay brahmaandas sum gare
Akh suy manthar tsetas kare
Tas saas manthar kyah kare.

He who holds the one Om on his navel
A bridge between his and the cosmic consciousness
And remembers just this one mantra
What need has he for a thousand mantras?

57. *Mithya, kapat, asath trovum*
Manas korum sui wopdeesh:
Zanas andar keeval zonum
Anas khenas kus chhum dweesh?

I let go of appearance, deceit and untruth
To my mind I gave but this advice:
See him alone in every one
Why shun the food offered by man ?

58. *Laz kaasi, sheet nivaariy*
Trin zal karaan aahaar
Yi kami wopdeesh dyutuy Batta
Atseetan vattas sacheetan dyun aahaar?

Hides your shame, saves you from the cold
Eats but grass and drinks just water
Who taught you this lesson, O Brahmin
To feed a lifeless stone with a living food?

59. *taari salil khot tay ture*
Himi tre gay binabin vimarsha
Tseyatani rav vaati sab samay
Shivamay tsaraarsar zag pasha.

When the cold works on water, it changes
Snow and ice – a triple delusion

But the consciousness – sun shines and all are one
See how the whole world becomes one in Shiva.

60. *Latan hund maaz laaryom vatan*
Akiy haavnam akichiy vath
Yim yim bozan tim kona matan
Lali booz shatan tim kuniy kath.

The flesh of my soles was pasted on the roads
Till the One showed me the one true path
Whoever hears will go mad with joy
Lal heard the one truth in all hundred.

61. *Shiv gur tay keeshav palnas*
Brahma paaydhan wolsyas
Yoogi yooga kali parzaanyas
Kus Deev ashva vaara peth chedyas?

Shiva is the horse, Keshava the saddle
And Brahma becomes the stirrup
The yogi through his yoga will come to know
Which God will dare to mount this horse.

62. *Gatulah akh vuchhum bwochhi saeti maraan*
Pan zan haraan pohni vaava lah
Neshbwod akh vuchhum vaazas maraam
Tana Lal bo praaraan thsenim ma prah

A learned one I saw die of hunger
Like a leaf falling away in winter wind
A fool I saw beating his cook
And I wait for the lure of life to fall off .

63. *Kava bodukh muha bavasodri dare*
Soth luhrih keyi tama paank

*Yama latha karnay kaeli chhondare
Kava zan kaasiy marikuni shaankh.*

Why have you sunk in the sea of desire?
The banks pulled down and fallen into a dark swamp?
Yama's men wait to drag your broken body away
Oh how can you overcome the fear of death?

64. *Niyam karyoth garba
Tsetas kar ba peyi
Maran bronthay mar ba
Murith ta martab hari.*

A vow you made in the womb
When will you recall it, pray?
Then die, while still alive
To find honour after death.

65. *Khena khena karaan kun no vaatakh
Na khena gathsakh ahankari
Somuy khe mali somuy aasakh
Sami khena mutsarnay bornen taari.*

Appeasing appetites will lead you nowhere
But denying them will surely lead to pride
Be moderate in life and moderate you will be
The doors are thrown open to the moderate.

66. *Tsal tseta vondas bay mo bar
Chon tseth karaan paana anaad
Tse ko zanani khyod hai kar
Keeval tasunday taaruk naad.*

O restless mind have no fear
The Eternal one is thinking of you
Do you know how your hunger is sated?
Only wait for his call to take you safe across.

67. *Swaman gaarun manz yath kande*
Yath kandi dopaan soroop naav
Loob muh tsali shoob yiyi kande
Yethi kandi teez tay sor prakash.

In this very body seek him with pure mind
This body they say is the abode of the supreme
Greed, illusion banished, your true self will glow
This very body will shine with light .

68. *Atha maba traavun kharba*
Luka hunz kongvaer kheyi
Tati kusba dari tharba
Yeti nunis kartal peyi.

Let not the donkey loose, I say
Lest he feed on others' saffron fields
Who will bare his back for you
And let the base sword fall on it?

69. *Yemi loob manmath mad tsoor morun*
Vati nashi maarith ti logun das
Tami sa haz ishar gorun
Tami soruy vwondun svaas.

The one who kills greed, lust
And pride, serves humanity in humility
He is the one who finds the Lord, Oh so easily
Everything else is ashes to him.

70. *Maarukh maarabooth kaam krood loob*
Nata kaan burith maarnay paan
Manay khen dikh sovetsar sham
Vishay tihund kyah druv zaan.

Kill the deadly demons, Lust, Anger and Greed
Or else their arrows will shoot you dead
Feed them little, restrain them with good thoughts
And know their substance as nothing.

71. *Gaal gandynam bol padynem*
Dapinem ti yas yi rutse
Sahaz kusumav pooz karynem
Bo amalani tu kas mutes.

Let them mock me or call me names
Or say whatever pleases them
Or worship me with flowers they may
Purified am I, indifferent to praise or blame.

72. *Aasa bol kadynem sasa*
Me mani vasa kheed nah eye
Bo yad sahas shankarbakta asa
Makris sasa mal kyah peye.

Let them abuse me with a thousand mouths
In my heart there is no hurt nor pain
If a true devotee of Sankara I am
My mirror will not be stained by ashes .

73. *Mood zenith pasith ti kor*
Kol shrut von zad ruph aas
Yus yi dapi tas ti bol
Yohuy tatva vidis chhu abyas.

Though wise, be a fool, seeing, be you blind
Be dumb and deaf, though aware, inanimate
Speak to them as they speak to you
That is the practice of those who know.

74. *Mansuy zan bavasaras*
Chhor koop neryas naaruk chhokh
Leka lekh yod tul koti
Tuli toola ta tul na kenh.

Your mind is like the ocean, know it as such
Constantly burns underneath the fire of rage
Spews words of abuse affects me not
The scales weigh them and find them hollow.

75. *Rut ta krut soruy pazem*
Kanan na bozun achhen na vaav
Oruk dapum yeli vwondi vuzam
Ratandeeph prazalem varzani vaav.

Let good or evil befall if it will
The ears will not hear nor the eyes see
When the voice calls me from within
My lamps'll burn bright, through storms adverse.

76. *Mandachhi haenkal kar thsenem*
Yeli hedun gelum asun praava
Aaruk jaama kar sana dazem
Yeli andarim khaareuk rozem vaar.

When will the shackles of shame be broken?
When to jibes and taunts indifferent I'll be?
When will the robes of pride burn away?
Only when the mind horse tamed will be.

77. *Paraan paraan zev taal phajin*
Tse yugy kray tajim na zanh
Sumran phiraan neuth ta onguj gajim
Manuchy duy mali tsajim na zanh.

Reading aloud, tongue and palate are blistered
But the art of pleasing you I never learnt.

Rosary beads wore tongue and finger out
But duality, my dear, never banished was .

78. *Parun swalab paalun dworlab*
Sahaz gaarun sikhim ta krooth
Abyasuki ganiray shastar mothum
Tseetan anand nishchay gom.

Easy it is to study, but hard to practise
To seek the self is subtle and tough
In the thick of practice of the sastras I forgot
Re-cognition brought bliss, certain and sure.

79. *Parun polum aporay porum*
Kesara vana vulum rutith shaal
Paras pranum ta paanas polum
Ada gom ta zeenim haal.

Practised what I read, learnt what was not read
Brought down the lion as a mere jackal
To others I taught and practised myself
Became aware and won the race.

80. *Kat chhuk divan anini bachhi*
Trukay chhukh ta andariyi aths
Shiva chhuy ati tay kun mo gaths
Sahaz kathi myani karto paths.

Why do you grope around like the blind
If you are wise go within yourself
Siva is there, don't go elsewhere
Trust my words, though simple they sound.

81. *Tseth amarpathi thaevize*
Aati tovuth logiy na zude

*Tati tsa no shaenizi sandaerzi
Doda shur ta kochhi no mudi.*

Set your mind on the immortal path
If you leave it the mind will stray
Have no doubt, be firm on it
A suckling baby, restless in the mother's lap.

82. *kus mari ta kas maaran?
Maari kus ta maaran kas?
Yus hara traavith gara gara kari
Ada suy mari ta maaran tas.*

Who will die. Who will be killed
Die who will, killed who will be
One who leaves God's name and chants of home
He is the one who will be slain .

83. *Gor shabdas yus yaths paths bare
Gyaan vagi rati tseth torgas
Yendray shomith aanand kare
Ada kus mari tay maaran kas.*

The one who chants and trusts the guru's word
Reins in the mind steed with the bridle of knowledge
Controls the senses and happiness finds
He will not die nor slain be.

84. *Grata chhu pheraan zeri zeri
Ohukuy zaani gratuk thsal
Grata yeli pheri tay zaevyul nere
Goon vaati paanay grata bal.*

Slow and steady turns the grindstone
The pivot alone knows the secret of its skill
As it turns it grinds so fine
The grain will find its way to the mill yard.

85. *Maarith pants booth tim phal hande*
Tsetan daana vokhur kheth
Tavay zaanakh param pad thsandi
Hishi khosho khor kenh tina kheth.

Feed the five bhutas like rams
Fatted on the plenty of self-awareness
Then will you know the Supreme, O restless energy
No rites, left-handed or right, will then be needed.

86. *Gyaan maarg chhuy haakvaer*
Dizes shama dama kriyi poni
Lama tsakar posh kreyi daar
Khena khena motsi vaeray theni.

The road to knowledge is like a kitchen garden
Let self-restraint and good deeds be the protective fence
A flock of goats will feed on it
Denuded. it will bring you release.

87. *Kush posh tel duph zal na gathse*
Sadbaav gor kath yus mane
Shambuvas swori neti panani yethse
Soy dapizi sa haz akreyi zeye.

No kusha flower sesame lamp water
If with a pure mind the guru's word you absorb
And on Siva meditate with nothingness
That is known as real spontaneous worship.

88. *Kus push ta kosa pushani?*
Kam kusum laagizes puze?
Kava gwod dizes zalchi dane?
Kava sana manthar Shanker swatm vuze?

Who is the florist, who the flower girl?
What flowers to be used for His worship?
From what lake draw water for bathing him?
Which is the mantra to awaken Sankara?

89. *Man push tay yaths pushani*
Baavuki kusum laegizes puze
Sheshi ras gwod dizes zaldani
Thsopi manther Shanker swatma vuze.

Mind is the florist devotion the flower-girl
Flowers of faith and love deck him in worship
The nectar of the mystic moon for his bath
This is the mantra to awaken him .

90. *Dvadashant mandal yas deevas thaji*
Naasik pavandari anahat rav
Soyam kalpan anati tsaji
Paanay su deev ta artsun kas.

He who broods on the Dwadashanta mandal
Knows Om rising as breath from the heart
Vain, selfish thoughts disperse and flee
Becomes God himself needs worship no other God.

91. *Sahazas sham ta dam na gatetsaar*
Yechhi no praavakh mukti dwaar
Salilas lavan zan meelith gathse
Toti chhuy dorlab sahas vetsaar.

Self-realization needs no ascetic mortification
The doors to liberation open with devotion not mere wish
Water may absorb salt in itself easily
But realization of self is still hard to find.

92. *Rav mata thali thali toepitan*

Toepitan votam desh

Varun mata looka gara atsitan

Shiva chhuy krooth ta tsen vopdesh.

The sun, and not shine on each and every thing

Only selectively on those who are great

Varuna and not enter every household

Heed the doctrine, Shiva is hard find.

93. *Zaanaha nadidal man ratith*

Tsatith vatith kutith kalesh

Zaanaha ada ast rasayan gatitho

Shiva chhuy krooth ta zaan vopdesh.

If only I knew how to control the nadis

Cut them from desire and sever the bonds of sorrow

Then I would know how to prepare the elixir

Heed the doctrine Shiva is hard to find.

94. *Yihay matri roop pay diya*

Yihay baarya rooph kari vishayesh

Yihay maya rooph anti zuv heye

Shiva chhyu krooth ta zaan vopdesh.

She is the one who suckles as mother

As wife, indulges in your embrace

As maya she takes life in the end

Heed the doctrine Shiva is hard to find .

95. *Shiva chhuy zaevyul zaal vaharaevith*

Kranzan manz chhuy toerith keth

Zinda nay vuchhahan ada katti marith

Paana maanza paan kad vetsaerith keth.

A fine web Shiva weaves covering everything

In all forms is present interwoven

In life unperceived how will you know him after death?
Think deep and see the self in yourself.

96. *Ban gol tay prakash aav zune*
Tsandar gol tay motuy tseth
Tseth gol ka kenh tin a kune
Gay boorbuvah swor vearzith kenth.

The sun sinks and light brightens the moon
The moon sets and the mind lights up
When the mind dissolves, nothing remains
Earth, air and sky are dissolved, where are they?

97. *Mal vondi zolum*
Jigar morum
Teli lali naau dram
yeli duli traevimas tatiy.

Burnt the filth of my mind and soul
Killed my heart with all its passions
Thus was I known as Lal
The hem of my garment spread out before him.

98. *Omkar yeli layi onum*
Vuhyuy korum panun paan
Shevot traevith sath marag rotum
Teli ba vaetsus parkash sthaan.

When Om I tamed and made my own
My body blazed like a flame
Gave up the six and took the one true path
Thus did Lal reach the abode of light.

99. *Raza hans aasith sapdukh koluy*
Kustaam tsoluy kyahtaam heth

*Grata gav band tay gratan hyot goluy
Grata vol tsoluy phal phol heth.*

A swan you were but now you are dumb
Someone stole something from you
The millstone stopped, its channel was choked
And the miller ran away with the grain .

100. *Prathayi teerthan gathsaan sanyasi
Gaaraan sudarshan myul
Chitta porith mav nishpath aas
Deshakh dure dramul nyul.*

To every place goes the sanyasi
Seeking the realization of self and god
Know yourself, tread not these paths
The grass appears green seen from far.

101. *Kalan kaala zaeli yodvay tse gol
Vandiv gih va vandivvanvass
Zaaniyh sarvagath prabo amol
Yuthuy zaanekh tyuthuy aas.*

If vain thoughts you destroyed with time
Whether at home or the hermitage you dwell
You will know the Lord all-pervading and pure
Live you the truth that you yourself do find.

102. *Kenh chhi nendarihuti vudi
Kentsan vuden nesar peyi
Kenh chhi snaan karith aputi
Kenh chhi geh bazith ti akreyi.*

Some though asleep are still awake
Some though aware are fast asleep
Some though bathed are still unclean
Some in a household are still detached.



Habba Khatun (1554–1609)

In the centuries after Lal Ded, barring the work of Rupa Bhavani (17th century) women's writing was characterized by feeling rather than thought. Some of the works may have seemed a bit anaemic in comparison with Lal Ded's robust full-blooded words, and they lacked the radical, transforming power of her poetry. But the poets, Habba Khatun in the 16th century and Arnimal in the 18th, made a significant contribution in articulating the feelings of women, their situation in life, their sufferings and their longings. They are the original feminists in that they foreground women's issues and expose the cruelties they suffer.

Kashmiri poetry, unlike English poetry, has the convention of always using the female voice in love lyrics, whether the poet is a man or a woman. No one did this better than Mahmud Ghami in the 18th century in one of his lyrics, which began with the question, '*kar sa myon nyay ande maer mande madanwaro*', (when will you do me justice, my handsome beloved?). But there are nuances that only a woman can introduce, while describing the many shades of suffering which she has undergone. In the works of Habba Khatun and Arnimal there is intense feeling in the way they describe the pain of being a woman, whether as a tortured daughter-in-law or an abandoned wife.

With Habba Khatun we are in the realm of pure lyricism, which delights in celebrating the world of the senses. Her words are occasionally a lament, sometimes they are seductive, sometimes they invite and at others they are complaints. In the process she presents the various facets of a lover's condition. These are the themes she is most comfortable with. In her songs—and they are indeed songs, meant to be sung, hence highly musical in rhyme, rhythm and cadence—she touches upon various moods of a woman in love, one who is not content to just love and worship from a distance, but demands fulfilment. There is a heavy air of pathos and despondency in many of the poems. The words below, for example, are a cry from the heart:

The world is nothing but misery, listen, O mynah, Nothing will remain, not even a memory,

Through the world I searched everywhere, But nothing did gain from this juggler, No friends, no sibling, no one remains, Nothing will remain, not even a memory.

Though she lived in a historically important time in Kashmir, in her verses we find no reference to events like the removal of the last Kashmiri king, Yusuf Shah Chak, and the annexation by the Mughal king Akbar—she is too wrapped up in her own affairs of the heart.

Habba Khatun's life, like that of Lalded and Rupa Bhawani, is swaddled in legend. She makes no claim to sainthood, and her love poetry is rooted in the world and all that it has to offer. Even when she is addressing the Almighty, her tone is more of a complaint against His ways rather than veneration. Many Kashmiri writers attribute mystical qualities to her life. Her very birth has also been mythicized and stories of her supernatural powers built around it.

Some claim that she was from the border district of Gurez in Kashmir, the daughter of a 'Bota Raja', who gave her to a Kashmiri trader in lieu of money that he owed him. There is a peak with a waterfall in Gurez which is still known by her name. (Gurez lay on the trade route to Gilgit and what has come to be known as the Northern Territories and is now part of Pakistan.) 'Bota' is the term used by the Kashmiris for the inhabitants of Ladakh, Baltistan and Gilgit, in fact for all those who have Mongolian features. In this version of her life, she discloses her spiritual powers to the man to whom she was married. The unlettered villager takes fright, complains to his mother that his new wife is a witch and he refuses to live with her. She is then divorced and sent back to her parents' home in the village where, it is said, she spent her days working in the fields and pouring out her feelings in songs she composed until one day the king of Kashmir, Yusuf Shah Chak, happens to hear her and, captivated by her music and wit, makes her his queen.

On the opposite side of the spectrum is the theory that she was actually a professional singer, who set to music her own repertoire of songs (in fact there is a popular sufiana composition, *rast-e Kashmiri*, which is said to have been her creation), became a courtesan and found her way to the court

of Yusuf Shah Chak and became his favourite mistress. Or was she simply a village girl from the village Chandhar, near the present day Pampore who, apart from being literate (in fact learned in religious texts), was a talented poet and musician with the wit and wisdom to become and stay the consort of a king? Yet another version denies her very existence, believing it to be the product of pure imagination and placing the story of her life with Yusuf Shah in the realm of romantic tales so prolific in Kashmiri literature, like the story of Noshlab and Ajab Malik and celebrated in the *masnavi* Gulrez.

Explanations of why her first marriage did not last also differ. Was it the traditional villain, the mother-in-law? Or was it because her husband could not bear the fact that his wife's learning and skill in poetry showed him in poor light? Was it because she dared to tread an unbeaten path, singing her compositions openly, pouring out her feelings and experiences as a victim of oppression? Or would her poetic efforts have been more tolerable if she had used Persian instead of Kashmiri? Not only because the former was the respectable language of scholarship, but dressed in Persian, the revelations of sorrow or complaints would have been unintelligible to almost everyone in the village, and been passed off as an intellectual exercise rather than a personal experience.

How she first met Yusuf Shah Chak also throws up a rich vein of interesting versions. According to one, overcome by despair after the humiliating break-up of the marriage, she threw herself into the river Jhelum near Pampore and was rescued by the king's party who happened to be hunting in those parts, and was then brought to the notice of the king himself. Another account suggests that she was once working in the fields, singing as usual, when Yusuf Shah happened to hear her. A poetic exchange between the two is supposed to have taken place. There is a popular Kashmiri duet that records the musical dialogue:

The King:	A beautiful dame all dressed up and clean! What if it should rain, O Love?
Habba Khatun:	Let your heart be happy, O King! The sun will shine on, O Love!

As if this were not confusion enough, she has also acquired the reputation of being a saintly person, who renounced the world after the

defeat and exile of Yusuf Shah by Akbar the Mughal king, and only sang of God and other mystic subjects. But there is hardly any evidence of this in the poems themselves.

It is almost as if her life was mapped by a team of surveyors, each of whom worked independently of the other, following the contours of their separate territories without consultation or coordination between them. Add to this liberal doses of imagination and the result is a life shrouded in mystery and romance and in this, the truth is hard to find.

Love and the reproach for the absent lover are the dominant themes in her poems. The ‘waiting’ reveals a woman who is not afraid of admitting her physical desire for the lover and who tries different strategies to bring him back. She tempts him with her exceptional beauty, indulges in a subtle form of emotional blackmail, invokes the spectre of her being lowered into the grave before he deigns to come!

Yet of this helplessness is born a power—the power to express uninhibitedly a woman’s sexuality, which characterises the poetry of Habba Khatun and Arnimal. Habba Khatun proudly describes her exceptional physical and intellectual attributes, expecting the lover to acknowledge them. But in the last bit lies the rub: her inherent and acquired talents can only find justification if they are ‘enjoyed’ and appreciated by the lover, a man. All the preparations, the tempting invitations are an allurement, to draw him to herself and then he will find the reward—she will offer herself. It seems that her own enjoyment and relish lie only in the experience of his relishing and enjoying her.

There is no sense of so-called ‘womanly’ modesty or shame in demanding sexual fulfilment. Is it because she was trained to be a professional musician, a courtesan whose success demanded that she practice the art of seduction and who could compose explicit love poetry, almost erotic in its suggestiveness? Or was it that she was outside the pale of social norms, inhabiting a kind of *demi-monde* where you could turn the rules of puritanical morality upside-down? Or was her poetry acceptable because all of it was addressed to a husband? Five hundred years later, it is not possible to find easy answers to these questions. On the one hand, Habba Khatun proudly proclaims her ability to flawlessly recite the Koran and on the other, she unashamedly talks about liaisons with someone who

gazed at her over a window or wall, or stalked her at home, someone about whom she dared not tell her mother lest he prove untrue.

From the doorway he looked at me— Who showed him the way to
my home?
And now there's just anguish and pain!
How he fills me with longing for him!

From the window he looked at me The long-necked beauty that I am
My heart he left bereft How he fills me with longing for him!

This poem also builds on the word *vuchhanamay* (he looked at me), from different vantage points, their names rhyming with objects and feelings. And in her desire for a musical effect, sometimes the thoughts are not logically linked. This reinforces the fact that these are songs meant to be sung and therefore full of sweet rhymes scattered over the lines. The music of this festive, celebratory song can only be appreciated in Kashmiri— The sound that the words make is impossible to bring out in translation:
The delicate beauties are descending In our yard they come to dance and play!

Fairies from the sky, dancing they come To bathe in our waters divine Once
soothed, they will ascend back to their home In our yard they come to
dance and play!

She revels in the wealth of Kashmir's natural bounties and celebrates them in most of her poems, but her enjoyment is incomplete without the company of the object of her desire. For example:

The lilacs are all in bloom Did no word of my plight reach your ears?

The rivers and lakes are lined with blooms Let us go to the high meadows
and glens Even the distant woods are in bloom Did no word of my plight
reach your ears?

She uses an interesting device of stringing together names of the wealth of flora from the Kashmiri countryside, with general observations connected with the theme of a woman neglected by her lover, on a refrain-like opening line. The use of soft rhymes enhances the musical effect. Here is one such poem:

My heart you took and hid yourself Come back, my flower-decked lover!
Come friend, let's look for dandelion leaves But can one evade what fate
decrees?

Oh how the mobs toss my name about!
Come back, my flower-decked lover!

Come friend, let's look for basil leaves— But ah, the wound his axe
inflicts!

Did he ever send to know my plight?
Come back, my flower-decked lover!

Her poems are filled with observations and insights on the work women
do – from gathering herbs in the woods, to fetching water and spinning
yarn. Another strong theme that runs through her poetry is the plight of the
woman lover, bound by tradition, custom and social constraints. She is
painfully aware of the social constraints and the many restrictions on
women.

The birth of a daughter snares you in a web The birth of a daughter is
a smear on your name A lion you may be, but a jackal you become.
Wake up my jewel, from your sleep.

There is also an ache and a longing to go 'home' in most of her songs.

However, her later verses are quite different from the playfulness of her
youthful lyrics. In these, she is deeply pessimistic even while trying to be
philosophical :

Slowly, Oh so slowly I waste away Till the youthful me fades away, O love.

With full preparation I left my home Just to see your beautiful face, O love.
But the curly locks of the lover Stung me like the bites of so many snakes,
O love.

Do not laugh, my friend, who suffers like me?

Cut into pieces I am! O love.

Habba Khatun herself sang thus For love and longing of her lover, Oh love.

Habba Khatun's poetry is written in the form of *vatsans*, that is rhyming
couplets or quatrains. She uses the device of the inverse refrain, repetition
of the first line of stanzas rather than the usual practice of using the last line

of the stanza as refrain. As well, the rhymes she creates are scattered within the lines of the poem and not confined only to its last words and syllables.

These are lyrics steeped in romanticism, highly metaphorical and symbolic, that build a charged atmosphere of passionate, not Platonic love. She is not interested in 'becoming' like Lal Ded, she is only interested in 'being'. This, added to the fact (as previously mentioned) that her lyrics are actually songs meant to be sung, makes them intensely musical. At times, one may well think that the scattered sweet rhymes show her preference for sound *patterns* rather than sound *sense*. Her images jump from one object to another, and the effect is scintillating. This special quality ensures that Habba Khatun's work is part of the collective memory of all Kashmiris; the conventions she laid down deeply influenced Arnimal, and were also followed by the male secular poets of Kashmir.

1. *Dil nith ratitham goshay
Valo myani poshe madano.*

*Vala vesi gathsavay hande
Lanyun nyay kati ande
Lukamati kadnas rande
Valo myani poshe madano.*

*Vala vesi gathsavay babre
Chhokhay loynam tabre
Kanthsa sooznam na khabre
Valo myani poshe madano.*

*Vala vesi gathsvay heeye
Yus mari su kati yiye
Praaraan chhas chani zeeye
Valo myani poshe madano*

*Vala vesi gathsvay aabas
Duniya chhu nendre ta khabas
Praaraan chhasayo javabas
Valo myani poshe madano.*

*Vala vesi gathsvay krethse
Lukamati tujnas rethse
Timan tem yon hue gathse
Valo myani poshe madano.*

*Vala vesi gathsvayvan tay
Lookav barihas kan tay
Tee booz tami saadan tay
Valo myani poshe madano.*

*Vala az duy traav meni
Chham manikaman chaeni
Aekhar chhu duniya faeni
Valo myani poshe madano.*

Aftab thsaraan zoone
Lanyun chhu vaalaan vunay
Von ishara Habba Khotune
Valo myani poshe madano.

You took my heart and hid yourself
Come back, my flower-decked lover!

Come friend, let's look for dandelion leaves –
Who can erase what fate decrees!
The mobs, they toss my name about
Come back, my flower-decked lover!

Come friend, let's look for basil leaves –
Ah, the wound his axe inflicts!
He sent no one to ask after me
Come back, my flower-decked lover!

Come friend, let's look for honeysuckle –
The one who dies does not come back
Still I wait for what he'll bring
Come back, my flower-decked lover!

Come friend, let's go fetch water
The world is lost to sleep and dreams –
Still I wait for what he'll say
Come back, my flower-decked lover!

Come friend, let's go look for herbs
The mindless hordes, O how they taunt!
I wish they'd suffer just like me
Come back, my flower-decked lover!

Come friend, let's roam the woods so wild
With such bitter venom they filled his ears
And that simpleton, he believed it all!
Come back, my flower-decked lover!

Come back, forget your dislike of me
It is only you my heart desires –
The world is not immortal, after all!
Come back, my flower-decked lover!

The sun seeks the moon
Fate clouds the mind
Habba's hints reveal the truth!
Come back, my flower-decked lover!

2. *Thovnama rumarumay*
Chhumay bale tamanna.

Dosi patha vuchhunamay
Tosa pombur gandasay
Gosa kya rotnamay
Chhumay bale tamanna.

Barakini vuchhunamay
Gara kami hovnasay
Zara zara thovnamay
Chhumay bale tamanna.

Darikini vuchhunamay
Kari voguni durdaeni
Tari dil kornamay
Chhumay bale tamanna.

Vogapethi vuchhunamay
Shoga laegith boolnam
Ragi rogi gom gumay
Chhumay bale tamanna.

Kanipeth vuchhunamay
Voni laegith angan tsaam
Daeni daeni gaejnasay
Chhumay bale tamanna.

*Pashi peth vuchhunamay
Lashi naara zaejnasay
Nashi kya rotnamay
Chhumay bale tamanna.*

*Pot zuni vuchhunamay
Mot laegith kot aam
Lot kava lognamay
Chhumay bale tamanna.*

*Yaarabala vuchhunamay
Maara karnas aarval
Nara paan zolnamay
Chhumay bale tamanna.*

Every pore of my body aches
He fills me with desire!

He looked at me from over the wall
I would have wrapped him in the finest shawl
Why was he so offended?
He fills me with desire!

He looked at me from the doorway –
Who showed him to my home?
For me, there's only anguish!
He fills me with desire!

He looked at me from the window
Long-necked beauty that I am
He left my heart so empty
He fills me with desire!

He looked at me from the skylight
Spoke to me like a song-bird
Slowly, he vanished from sight.
He fills me with desire!

He looked at me from the attic
Like a trader, he entered my house
Bit by bit he wasted me away
He fills me with desire!

He looked at me from the rooftop
He let me burn like a flaming torch
He left me nothing but regret
He fills me with desire!

He glanced at me as the moon was sinking
Why did he come like a man so mad
Why did he play that part
He fills me with desire!

He looked at me from the river bank
The rose's bud was lost forever
The fire of love consumed me
He fills me with desire !

3. *Laji phulay yosmanan*
Tse kanan goy na myon?

Laji phulay kolasaran
Vothu neryan khasavo
Rangaranga posh pholi vanan
Tse kanan goy na myon?

Laji phulay door gaaman
Vothu maalyun gathsavo
Phaji kosam tatinas
Tse kanan goy na myon?

The lilacs are all in bloom
Did news of my plight not reach you?

The rivers and lakes are lined with flowers
Let's go to the high meadows and glens

Even the distant woods are in bloom
Did news of my plight not reach you?

Far away villages are also in bloom
Let us go to my parent's home
Where flowers line the meadows
Did news of my plight not reach you ?

4. *Heri vathsay yima achhidaaray*
Son vathsay gindanay.

Asmaanuchi viginay vathsay
Aabi kausar chhavnay
Manaraevith beyi turi khatsaye
Son vathsay gindanay.

Soporuchi vaanunu khatsaye
Zaenukadal vuchhunay
Aena bungri laegith vathsaye
Son vathsaye gindanay.

Wolaruchi gaada khatsaye
Sendi zal chhavane
Treshi hatsa beyi turi khatsaye
Son vathsaye gindane.

Yandarazani sendramatse
Andra aasay vaayaan soz
Tosa kati kati tim losa matsay
Son vathsaye gindane.

Yavanane tujim ratsay
Tani vaerivi naadas aam
Chashima aasam nendrihatsay
Son vathsaye gindane.

Hashi ditsanam mohara dothsay
Osh logum haarne

*Chham na khabar aasam katsay
Son vathsaye gindane.*

*Habba Khotuni mejaaye matse
Tima ti aasas mutsaraavaan
Tim ti aasaynaara khota tatsay*

Son vathsaye gindane.

The delicate beauties are descending
They come to our yard to dance and play!

Fairies from the sky, dancing they come
To bathe in our waters divine
Once soothed, they will ascend back home
They come to our yard to dance and play!

From Sopore, the beauties, they have come
To see the sights of Zaina Bridge
Decked with mirrors, their bangles jingle
They come to our yard to dance and play!

Fish from the Wullar, they are all here
To revel in the waters of the Sindh
Their thirst unquenched, they still return
They come to our yard to dance and play!

Dancers from Indra's courts descend
Playing their melodious lutes
Asked to spin Shahtush, they all wore out!
They come to our yard to dance and play!

My youth had just begun to bloom
When my in-laws asked for me
My eyes were still half asleep
They come to our yard to dance and play!

Mother-in-law filled my hands with gold
But tears ran down my cheeks

I could not count their number
They come to our yard to dance and play!

Habba sought out the women called mad
At her they only laughed
Like raging fire were their words
They come to our yard to dance and play!

5. *May kari tseyi kiti poshi dasvaanay*
Chhav myani daenay posh. Tsu chhukh.

Bo chhasay zameen tsu chhukh asmaanay
Seeras tsu chhukh sarposh
Bo chhasay nemath tsu chhukh mezmaano
Chhav myani daenay posh.

Laele gati manz tsong zajanay
Baale roodus na hosh
Tsu chhuham shama bo chhas parvaanay
Chhav myani daenay posh.

Rathsi rathsi retakol chum soraanay
Bara ma gathsa achhiposh
Kunihata bulbua yita aki aanay.
Chhav myani daenay posh.

Braga teer aesus peth darichikhanay
Roodum tin a zari hosh
Ada yikha yeli baal soorapan haane
Chhav myani daenay posh.

Ranga ranga thuri ami kraalan baanay
Byon byon karinakh naqoosh
Kenh draayi halikali kenh jaanaanay.
Chhav myani daenay posh.

Tsaerith animay phamba moyane
Jaanaana me mo rosh

Habba Khotuni roodum armaanay.
Chhav myani daenay posh.

Bouquets of flowers I make for you
O come my love, revel in the blooms
Bouquets of flowers I make for you
Come my love, revel in the blooms.

I am the earth, you are the sky
A covering for my secrets are you
I am the banquet, you are the guest
Come my love, revel in the blooms.

In secret, Laila lit a lamp in the dark
Innocent, she knew not the ways of the world!
You are my candle, I am your moth
Come my love, revel in the blooms.

My summer is slowly waning
Its flowers will fade away
Bulbul, find a reason to come to me
Come my love, revel in the blooms.

The plume on your forehead, so superb and high
My wits and senses it stole away
Will you not come till I am dust?
Come my love, revel in the blooms.

Pots of hues on the potter's wheel
With so many designs he drew on them
Save for a few, all dented and bent
Come my love, revel in the blooms.

The softest wool I sought and found
Don't turn away from me, my love
Habba dies, desires unfulfilled!
Come my love, revel in the blooms .

6. *Tse kamyu soni myani brama dith nyunakho
Tse kaho gayi myani duy.
Tsakh traavduy malaal bas chhuham me tsui
Tse kaho gayi myani duy.*

*Nesaf raatan bar vathi traevimo
Saathaa yikhna tsuy
Phera chhu na kenh ta phera chhukh paavaan
Tse kaho gayi myani duy.*

*Madan vaaro badan zoltham
Gothsaho me aadan tsuy
Baadaam cheshmav khoon chhasayo haaraan
Tse kaho gayi myani duy.*

*Shraavan sheen zan bo galaan aayas
Baagas phojista tsuy valo chhavaan
Chonay bag ta tsuy valo chhaavaan
Tse kaho gayi myani duy.*

*Zol chham na yivaan mola chhukh vaalaan
Gam chum vaelinji suy
Zaanh chhukh na dodmut seens sahlaavaan
Tse kaho gayi myani duy.*

*Thsaaraan loosus kohan ta baalan
Soraan aam baali den
Raah kyah lodtham kona chhuham maazaan
Tse kaho gayi myani duy.*

*Tan chhas navaanjaama chhas paeraan
Haavaan chhasya chaeni druy
Yaavnas pananis chhoh chhas maaraan
Tse kaho gayi myani duy.*

*Habba Khotun chhay armaan khevaan
Karmay na zaanh bandage*

Yaavun rovmut chum yaad yivaan
Tse kaho gayi myani duy.

Which rival of mine has charmed you thus
Why do you turn from me in disgust?
Forgive my trespass, my only love!
Why do you turn from me in disgust?

In the dead of the night I threw open my doors
Why miss this moment, why won't you come in?
Aren't we one, you and I, why make a distinction?
Why do you turn from me in disgust?

You burned up my body, my handsome one
You're the one that I want, I've wanted you only
Blood pours like tears from my almond eyes
Why do you turn from me in disgust?

Like snow in the summer, I'm melting away
I've bloomed like a vine in this garden for you
The garden is yours, come enjoy it, do
Why do you turn from me in disgust?

I can't sleep a wink, you demean me so
The grief that you cause eats away at my heart
Not once did you cool my burning breast
Why do you turn from me in disgust?

I have searched over mountains and hills, I am spent
My day sank behind that yonder peak
What is my blame, why do you spurn me so?
Why do you turn from me in disgust?

My body I bathe, fresh garments I don
Only your name I chant and swear by
But alas my youth only I appreciate!
Why do you turn away from me in disgust?

Tears I shed in a flood-like flow
Only you I long for, all the time
Why did you forget the way to my home?
Why do you turn away from me in disgust?

I, Habba Khatun crave for ever
But never did I bow my head
My lost youth I remember now
Why do you turn away from me in disgust ?

7. *Naala divan loosus vanan*
Tas ti kanan gav na vesiye.

Damadama kal chham ganan
Ami gamay aayas basi
Hanihanay maaz chum chhanan
Tas ti kanan gav na vesiye.

Graay karnam ami yaavnan
Tana pevaan chhas vusi vusi
Tsoori tsolum vani kati anan
Tas ti kanan gav na vesiye.

Laji phulayguli yosman
Drayi aashiq kami haavasuy
Mushik hevaan chhi gulshanan
Tas ti kanan gav na vesiye.

Habba Khotun tsajeyi vanan
Vana kaetyah zaalan phasi
Azla laenis kenh chhuna banan
Tas ti kanan gav na vesiye.

I trudged through the woods with complaint on my lips
But my cry never reached him, my friend.

Slowly my desires grow stronger
This sorrow consumes me so.

Slowly my flesh is eaten away
But my cry never reached him, my friend.

As my youth bloomed and flowered
I drooped, I withered in despair
He stole away, where do I look?
But my cry never reached him, my friend.

The lilac bushes are blooming
Eager lovers walk together
To breathe the perfumes of the gardens
But my cry never reached him, my friend.

Habba sought refuge in forests
But her feet got tangled in nets
Who can change what's written by fate?
But my cry never reached him, my friend.

8. *Seka petha guma chhus mokhta zan haraan
Baal chhas karaan kosman kraav'.*

*Shalamaara bihith pyaala chhas baraan
Daala chhas nivaan yuri vaatyam jaar
Aarakuts poshan maala chhas karaan
Baal chhas karaan kosman kraav.*

*Ishabara bihithay sheesha chhas baraan
Keesh chhas paeraan vaatam jaar
Dishi kami byunthum rasha chhas maraan
Baal chhas karaan poshan kraav.*

Pearls of perspiration fall from his brow
I gather a harvest of flowers!

In Shalimar I sit and fill goblets of wine
And scan the earth, waiting for him
In my misery, I string flowers together
While I gather a harvest of flowers!

At Ishber I fill my cups to the brim
I comb my hair as I wait for him
Has he strayed? I'm holding my breath
I gather a harvest of flowers!

9. *Tohi ma dyunthvon sui he*
Yemi bo dohay gaejnas.

Tulakatur logam pohay
Taapa Haaran gaejnas
Joyen laejnas dohay
Yemi bo dohay gaejnas.

Path vanuch aesus bo he
Ami gotuli vaejnas
Tsandan daaras kornam toh he
Yemi bo dohay gaejnas.

Kyah lyukhnam azla lone
Asta astay zaejnas
Habba Khotun vajis moh he
Yemi bo dohay gaejnas.

Has anyone seen him anywhere, any day?
He's whom I pine for, wasting away.

Winter turns me to ice
In summer I melt away
I must search for him always
He's whom I pine for, wasting away.

I used to live in a forest of pine
I lived there until I was felled by his axe
From a log of sweet sandal, I turned into ash
He's whom I pine for, wasting away.

Is this what fate had in store for me
That I should smoulder, burn so slowly

Habba was caught in love's tangled web
He's whom I pine for, wasting away.

10. *Poshi baagas dimasay von he*
Madun kor kunaye gov.

Chon firaaq chum lalavunaye
Son kun te lagi hee naav
Vanta kath kyuth myon aasunaye
Madun kor kunaye gov.

Oths zuv myon gathsun Goths lasunye
Poths nay yor rozuni aav
Kaeli aasyam gara gathsunye
Madun kor kunaye gov.

Ratsa tuli tuli rudum chhonye
Matsi nahaqan gom taav taav
Von Sahibas Habba Khotuniye
Madun kor kunaye gov.

This pain of your separation is what I must bear
Why will you never come this way?
Tell me, now what do I live for?
Where did my love hide himself ?

This fragile self has not long to live
The guest I wait for is yet to come
Soon I will have to leave this place
Where did my love hide himself ?

Whatever I gather is never enough
Whatever I do they taunt me, she's mad
Habba can only pray to her Lord
Where did my love hide himself ?

11. *Chhiya bari bari masa pyaalo*
Vothu laalo nendare.

*Achhiposhan karay bo maalo
Vothu laalo nendre.*

*Koor zena yikh hena zaalo
Koor zena rozi paam
Suh aesith gathsi shaalo
Vothu laalo nendre.*

*Heeyi paanas phulay lajimo
Tab ishqun krooth pyom
Habba Khotuni vani misaalo
Vothu laalo nendre.*

Brimming cups of wine await you
Wake my jewel, wake from your sleep
Garlands of flowers I've made for you
Wake my jewel, wake from your sleep.

The birth of a daughter, you're caught in a web
The birth of a daughter, a blot on your name
You may be a lion, but a jackal you'll become
Wake my jewel, wake from your sleep.

My body's a honeysuckle in full bloom
But the weight of love is too much to bear
Habba only tells what she has seen
Wake my jewel, wake from your sleep .

12. *Gaah chon pevaan gati
Aki lati yiyam naa.*

*Yaavan myani kirmiz pati
Kamyu vaana ranganay aakh
Me no zon athur tsati
Aki lati yiyam naa.*

*Aabas bo vuthus gati
Not mothum yarabal*

*Vizri vaava not ma phati
Aki lati yiyam naa.*

*Hoorā Lail draayās gati
Tsoorabay pyomo naav
Sona kan ta ladur hati
Aki lati yiyam naa.*

*Yaar myon chhu Jamalati
Kamaal tas chum naav
Su chum tali bo kas mati
Aki lati yiyam naa.*

*Yaaruz yeli yaar tsati
Mohbat na rozaan saer
Yaar dadi vaeinj phati
Aki lati yiyam naa.*

Your light shines through the dark
Won't you come here just this once?

The bloom of my youth was rose-red wool
Someone dyed it in this glorious shade
Who'd have thought it would be food for moths?
Won't you come here just this once?

I went to fetch water in the dark of night
But I forgot my pot unfilled at the bank
What if the cruel wind should sink it?
Won't you come here just this once?

Dusky Laila could go out at night
But here they call me a thief
There's gold at my ears and coral round my neck
Won't you come here just this once?

My beloved lives at Jamalatta
His name, bless him, is Kamaal

He is so far away, with whom has he left me?
Won't you come here just this once?

When the beloved himself cuts the ties
How can poor love survive?
The heart must surely break from love!
Won't you come here just this once ?

13. *Vuchhitay vesiye kahandi bo zaayas*
Baagni aayas kahande taam.

Doha aki kamitaam doori vuchhaenas
Vata gata laegith pata pata aam
Gara yam tsaayas pot beyi draayas
Baagni aayas kahande taam.

Doha aki tsoori tsoori maaji nish tsaayas
Zon gom kath nay bani chham paam
Tas nishi kath vananay mandchhaayas
Bagni aayas kahande taam.

Doha aki maeli maaji nagra harshaayas
Shaharuchi aesas vaetsus gaam
Kyah kara pooshis na laeninis nyaayas
Bagni aayas kahande taam.

Doha aki siriyisaan maalyun gayaayas
Dekabaji Kakni ditsnam paam
Dekarasi Zoone kona moyaayas
Bagni aayas kahande taam.

See my friend, where I was born
And where I've come as a bride!

Who was it who saw me one day
And trailing my steps, followed me home?
I'd hardly stepped in when I walked out again
Look where I have come as a bride!

I crept to my mother, I thought I'd tell her all
But, they'd mock me if he proved untrue
So, ashamed, I held my tongue
Look where I have come as a bride!

And then one day I was married off
A city girl, to the country sent
How could I fight against my fate?
Look where I have come as a bride!

I came to my parent's home, thinking it was my right
But brother's wife, she pierced me with her barbed words
Why did I not die the day I was born
Look where I have come as a bride!

14. *Tula naar chum lalavun moore*
Kaensi ma raevin shore paan.

Maeli maaji rachhanas kongas kasture
Doda suti aesim tan naavan
Suy paan logmo raah musafire
Kaensi ma raevin shore paan.

Maeli maaji traevnas sabaqas doore
Okhnan volnam moore paan
Aara rosi tulinam naara tamboore
Kaensi ma raevin shore paan.

Maeli maaji harshaayas yeli doore
Pata pata draayam vesu vanvaan
Hola gom andri lola talure
Kaensi ma raevin shore paan.

Maeli maaji vonanam dekabadi koore
Vaerivi aangan chhi praaraan
Ranga doli aasam ropa kondoore
Kaensi ma raevin shore paan.

*Bo chhasay yeti tay tsu chhuham doore
Doshvay draayeyi jaeni jaan
Me no zaanyov lodmut lore
Kaensi ma raevin shore paan.*

*Day nay diyi tay deka nay poore
Vaymuts aasyaa kaensi poshaan
Moy chav Habba Khotuni turi ture
Kaensi ma raevin shore paan.*

A smouldering fire consumes a tender shoot
Let no one lose their innocence thus.

Anointed with oils of musk and saffron was I
They would bathe my body with milk
This body now wanders the streets as a beggar
Let no one lose ones innocence thus!

They sent me far from home to learn
The album shaped me with his cane
It burnt my skin with sparks of fire
Let no one lose one's innocence thus!

'Blessings on you, our fortunate daughter'
'Your in-laws wait in their yard!'
They strung my palanquin with silver bells
Let no one lose their innocence thus!

They sent me off with joyous music
My friends' songs rang in the air
But pain made a knot inside my heart
Let no one lose their innocence thus!

Now you are far and I'm on this shore
We should've been one soul
I did not know the built would fall
Let no one lose their innocence thus!

When god withholds, there is no luck
A handful of rice won't last
Habba drinks cupfuls of bitter wine
Let no one lose their innocence thus!

15. *Vaeriven suti vaara chhas no*
Chara karu myon maalinyo.

Gari bo draayas aaba natis
Not me phutmo maalinyo
Yaata ditov nati nota
Nata haara natiche maalinyo.

Shuri paanas sendur gayimo
Vudur khasun kudur pyom
Katri thsaaraan katur sanimo
Vetri noon pyom maalinyo.

Hashi laeyinam topisuy thaph
Suy me gomo mota khota sakh
Yendrapachi peth nendur peyimo
Tsakhur phutmo maalinyo.

Yaara daade taari gayiso
Baarabukh chum aamutay
Habba Khotuni von ishaaraa
Dil hushaaraa maalinyo.

I'm so unhappy in my in-laws home
O parents mine, help me find a way.

They sent me out to fetch some water
But parents mine, the pot, it broke
You must buy me a new one
Or pay its price, O parents mine.

The child in me, powdered to vermilion
Climbing to the plateau was so hard

I searched for bits of the broken pot, my foot was pierced by a shard
It was salt on my wounds, O parents mine.

My mother-in-law grabbed me by my hair
It felt to me worse than death.
I feel asleep on the spinning of the wheel
The wheel came apart, O parents mine!

Friendless, forsaken, forlorn
My heavy heart ready to burst
Habba Khatun tells you in signs
Won't you wake up, O parents mine?

16. *Haarni taapay sheen zan galayo*
Balayo panane maaline.

Shalamaer baagas magus ranayo
Sona Laenki zoola zaalayo
Su nay deeshan bo ti soor malayo
Balayo panane maalinyo.

Daedilad chhas tay pata pata laarayo
Poh vaava pan zan haraeyo
Vila nay bozyam gil ma marayo
Balayo panane maalinyo.

Daah chum gomutkotah vanayo
Vonda mutsaraevith haavoyo
Kananay zar pyom vananay tsalayo
Balayo panane maalinyo.

Laasun goham paadan pemyo
Habba Khotun ma haaneyo
Ada ma pheri metsi tal ralyo
Balayo panane maalinyo.

In the heat of the summer I melt like ice
I'll only be whole in my mother's home.

I cook fine foods in the Shalimar
And light strings of lamps in Sona Laenk
If I don't see him, I'll cover myself in ashes
I'll only be whole in my mother's home.

Sick and wasted, I trail your steps
Winter winds blow away my leaves
Your deafness makes me a song-less bird
I'll only be whole in my mother's home.

So much hostility! How much can I tell?
I bare my heart for you to see
My ears are deaf, I run to the woods
I'll only be whole in my mother's home.

How far you stray! I fall at your feet
Habba Khatun will waste away
What good's your regret, when I'm one with the earth
I'll only be whole in my mother's home.

17. *Chhana maline den guzaeri*
Kuh bo rozay vaerivi tay.

Yeli yinamo manzimyaeli
Vardan ananamo baazra tay
Naeli traavnam sonahaeri
Kuh bo rozay vaerivi tay.

Doli myani lagi savaeri
Me kori vanvano patay patay
And tse lagoonay taeti bichaeri
Kuh bo rozay vaerivi tay.

My days can no longer be spent at home
I want to live in my in-laws' house

When the matchmakers come
My trousseau will come from the market

They will deck me in clothes of gold
So I want to live in my in-laws' house.

When I ride in my palanquin
Singing voices will trail in my wake
'May your life end there', they will say
So I want to live in my in-laws' house.

18. *Duniya chhu taavan boz vanahaeri*
Rozi na yadavaeriye.

Vani me ditimo samsaaras
Kenh no laaryom baezigaaras
Yarbay tim na china saeri
Rozi na yaadaavaeriye.

Kyah karni duniyaahas aayas
Kath kits maelis maaje zaayas
Thaevinam na vuthi barnen taeri
Rozi na yaadaavaeriye.

Vuchhaha pananis karobaras
Vantam yaaras kyah daaras
Nahaqay ladunam tami baeri
Rozi na yaadaavaeriye.

Ashqa naar aashiqan chhu lalavono
Lola baazras manz sulvaano
Kenh dadi nura ta kenh naeri
Rozi na yaadaavaeriye.

Kentsan chonuy chhuy armaano
Kenh mahpaaray tseyi praaraan
Habba Khotuni vaninay zaeri
Rozi na yaadaavaeriye.

The world is nothing but misery, O mynah!
Nothing will last, not even a memory

Mynah, the world's a miserable place
Nothing will last, not a memory.

I searched through the world
But the trickster gave me nothing
No friends, nor siblings, no one remains
Nothing will last, not a memory.

Why did I come into this world?
Why was I even born?
Not a single door has been unlocked for me
Nothing will last, not a memory.

I have scanned my past accounts
Tell me what I owe, my love
Why did he load me with this burden?
Nothing will last, not a memory.

Lovers must bear the fire of love
In the market of love it rages on
The divine blaze consumes only some
Nothing will last, not a memory.

Some long for you
Some moonbeams wait for you
Habba tells of her plight
Nothing will last, not a memory.

19. *Hani lo hani lo hani lo*
Baal gajis hani lo.

Sambaal karith gari baal draayyas
Jamaal chon vuchhane lo.

Khumaarahuti pem yaara sundi konkal
Shahmar zan buchhane lo.

As may vesiye myon hue kas gov
Tana gaemutsa chham gani lo lo. Slowly, slowly, Oh so slowly.

*Baaz nay yiyam bizgar karnas
Maaz nishi vuskhaan chheniye lo.*

*Tas mo gathsin tas nishi juday
Yus yas dilas sani lo.*

*Zuvuk zodaan yurikun pheri na
Zuv yam rovim kaamni lo.*

*Suyye yiyi na Yaavun bahaar
Phulaya laji myani tani lo.*

*Habba Khotune pad vani paana tas
Madanani mani kaamni lo.*

Slowly, so slowly, I wasted away
Till my youth faded, my love.

Fully adorned, I left my home
To see your beautiful face, my love
Like so many snakes they stung me
your drunken curly locks, my love.

Don't laugh my friend, who suffers like me?
I'm cut into pieces, my love
I'm ridiculed when you're not here
The flesh falls off my body, my love.

Let none be separated from their beloved
The thought of whom pierces the heart, my love
Won't my life return to me?
My life hangs on your love, my love.

Your arrival's springtime, it makes me young
My body bursts into blossoms, my love
That was Habba Khatun's song
For her love and her longing, my love.

20. *Sona hee phojikhay vanan kreedzaalan*
Posh vaejikhay poshi maalan kits.
Gul gathsan bara tay kreedan zaalan
Posh vaejikhay poshi maalan kits.

Chhivematis kyah gayi kalan
Bulbul lanje byuthum kas
Prithsasay manjuman vuchhasay phaalan
Posh vaejikhay poshi maalan kits.

Like a blossom of gold you lined the wild rose woods
But they brought you down to make a garland!
The blooms will wither, the thorny bushes burn down
They brought the flower down to make a garland.

The irrepressible one was drawn to what?
He chose a different branch as a perch
I would ask him why and look for omens
But they brought the flower down to make a garland.

You were a gold flower in the wild rose woods
To make a garland, they cut you down
Flowers will wither, thorny bushes will burn
To make a garland, they cut you down.

What drew away the restless bulbul?
He chose to perch on a different branch
If it were me I would have asked, I'd have looked for signs
To make a garland, they cut you down.

21. *Raah bakshatam saeri Parvardigaro*
Tse keho vaatiyo myaani marnay.

Hena bo aayas den kuho barayo
Vena kui rang gom khaasa babre
Lolasay thovthamo lalavun naar
Tse keho vaatiyo myaani marnay.

*Ladi draahamo maala khachaalo
Thsari atha saavnaylari kabre
Ada kona mada vothmo lokchaaro
Tse keho vaatiyo myaani marnay.*

*Vuchh tami sakhiyan kari kitho kaaro
Na su khoots teeran na su tabre
Ada tas naav pyov Sher-i-jabaaro
Tse keho vaatiyo myaani marnay.*

*Sepaara truhamara parem aki aano
Phera no kuni gom zera zabre
Ashqun khat kaensi porn a yakbaaro
Tse keho vaatiyo myaani marnay.*

*Tab chum badnas Habba Khotune
Ada no aaham zaanh ti khabre
Teli yikha yeli traavnam and mazaaro
Tse keho vaatiyo myaani marnay.*

Forgive me my faults, God
What will you gain from my death?

I'm caught in a web, how do I pass the day
My basil glow's now pale as mint
The fire you lit smoulders in my heart
What will you gain from my death?

You may load yourself with untold treasures
But you'll be empty-handed in the grave
Why, my youth, were you so proud?
What will you gain from my death?

I read the Koran in one attempt
I didn't make a single mistake
But I could not read the text of love
What will you gain from my death?

Habba's body is in such pain
You didn't come to see her even once
Are you waiting till I'm in my grave?
What will you gain from my death?



Introduction

Rupa Bhavani (1625–1721), a mystic and poet known as Alakheshwari, or simply Saheb, was born in the scholarly Brahmin family of Madhava Dhar at Safakadal, Srinagar.

From her childhood to the end of her long life, she was spiritually inclined. Though married at the age of seven, which was the prevalent social practice at the time, she renounced the submissive housewife's way of life, and left her husband's home. She was welcomed back in her natal home, but did not stay there long. Wandering from one secluded place to another, she practised great penance, and went into long periods of meditation, like the Buddha, in search of spiritual awakening and salvation. Having at last found, through profound yogic *sadhana* (discipline) and an inward-looking eye, the secret of equipoise, she communicated her experience of a cosmic consciousness to her band of loyal devotees through her poetic utterances. In addition, miracles were attributed to her by her followers, who believed her to be an incarnation of the goddess Bhavani.

The main facts of her life are known, thanks to her father's vision and belief in his daughter's spiritual destiny and legacy, which led him to have all the events connected with her life and work to be properly documented. It is remarkable that a father, who had followed custom in performing a child marriage, should welcome his daughter back into his home after she calmly announced that it was not possible for her to continue to live with her husband and his family because they showed no sensitivity to her 'differentness'. In fact, they accused her of being a witch, and attributed the miracles she is supposed to have performed to witchcraft.

Not only did Bhavani refuse to follow a woman's common fate—that of quiet submission to the norms set down by society—but she dared to break free and chart a course of her own. Her father's support of her decision undoubtedly had much to do with his own spiritual orientation and the certainty of his belief in her divinity. He was the first to acknowledge her

sainthood and established the practice of her being venerated as a saint. A temple and shrines were built in the places where she lived. Even Western-educated members of the Dhar clan to which she belonged, still make an offering of sweets at her shrine twice a year, and fast on the anniversary of her death. Whichever family a Dhar girl goes into after her marriage, also carries on with the practice. The result is that today most Kashmiri Pandit families have come under Rupa Bhavani's sphere of influence, believing that she was a saint endowed with great spiritual power .

Think that He is Immanent, Omnipresent, your Friend Omnipotent,
Unparalleled, Self-created, All-pervading Turn the eye inward,
find Nirvana unveiled, attain the Highest Abode.

Thus begins the opening stanza of Rupa Bhavani's poetic composition, *Rahasyopadesa*, setting the tone of her mystic journey and explaining how she achieved her goal of self-realization. For the mystic poet, the problem is communicating something she alone has experienced, and which runs the risk of self-referentiality. To most, this experience is impenetrable, lying as it does outside their 'normal' experience. To make it comprehensible, the only tools available are those of ordinary vocabulary, from which a word or phrase has to be found to explain the 'unexplainable'. A mystic would be quite content with the experience itself and to stay in that blissful state in silence, but as a poet she must speak, and vocabulary can at best be a rhetorical approximation of a state of mind. For example, the Sanskrit phrase 'antarmukhidrishti' occurs as a refrain at the end of many of Bhavani's verses. The literal meaning of the phrase is, 'a sight that faces inwards'. The act of *sadhana* is supposed to begin with meditation, in which one forgets everything that can be seen with the eyes, and everything regarding reality must be suspended. In its place, there is contemplation of one's own self by one's own self without any external aids—a kind of self-communion in which normal 'drishti' (vision) has no role to play.

The *Rahasyopadesh* is a collection of one hundred and forty-six stanzas in the form of *vaakhs*, a purely Kashmiri verse form in which the mystical poetry of Lal Ded was written in the fourteenth century. Each *vaakh* consists of four lines, each a trochaic tetrameter, and does not adhere to a

strict rhyme scheme. In fact, usually there is no rhyme, but a solemn rhythm which suits the generally grave tone of religious poetry. Of course, such poetry is often ecstatic too, and Rupa Bhavani's work includes varying rhythms to suit mystic outbursts of an ecstatic state of mind.

Rupa Bhavani begins the main part of *Rahasyopadesha*, with the acknowledgement that her father is among her first gurus:

I have placed my teachers, Lal and Madhav In my cleansed, purified mind
Reduced to nothing, I have become The supreme self, a part of Brahma.

The veneration of the guru in the first two lines, is a very important concern of hers. The guru is necessary not only to introduce her to the world of knowledge, but his hand is needed to guide her at every step of the arduous spiritual journey, which is similar to the Sufi dependence on the pir. It must be mentioned here that Rupa Bhawani used to have many dialogues with the Sufis of the time in Kashmir. In the next two lines, we find a metaphysical conceit in the manner of the English poet John Donne—one is nothing and everything at the same time, a common description of the mystical experience.

Generally, mystical or ecstatic song has been one of the forms used by women to protest the strictures and conventions of patriarchy. Mira, Christina Rossetti, and Rabia, all provide such instances, but Rupa Bhavani not only accepts patriarchy but even extols it, which is a comment upon the tightly-knit Kashmiri Pandit society of the time, where louder protest was unimaginable. Perhaps this veneration had something to do with Rupa Bhavani's respect for her father and his support when she broke with convention.

Due to the esoteric, subtle nature of her experiences, her poetic work is often enigmatic and inaccessible to the ordinary reader. This is the main reason why her poetry has never been 'popular'. Unlike most Kashmiri poetry, her *vaakhs* have never been sung, the form in which poems have been preserved in Kashmir's oral tradition. Her *vaakhs* are the province of the 'initiated', the verses generally being recited only at gatherings of her followers at special occasions such as the anniversary of her death. Even those who have taken up a serious study in the past, have added to the obscurity by interpreting the meaning according to their own particular philosophy. That the language used is a mixture of old Kashmiri, Sanskrit, and Persian, makes the task even more difficult. To her followers and

devotees, however, her words are precious gems, cherished till this day due to the aura of sainthood that surrounds her. A lay person is struck by the sheer force and weight of her argument, often presented through use of the device of the ‘metaphysical conceit’. An analysis of her poetry can, therefore, be both a challenge and a delight.

A close look at the *vaakhs* reveals that her main preoccupation is with primal philosophical questions: the purpose of life, and how to bring about a harmonious relationship among the constituents of an individual personality—body, mind, emotion and soul. She talks of how one can break free from the limitations of the body while working towards spiritual evolution and how to achieve a tranquility of mind. The detailed description of her own yogic practices and the experience of a rare ecstatic state brought about by an awakened *kundalini*, in which the burden of the material world seems to fall off and then, becoming pure spirit, the goal of merger with the absolute reality is achieved, are some of the main concerns of her work. The concept of *shunya*, (the state of nothingness or the idea of the great void) is mentioned again and again in the spirit of the Sufi who asks for nothing but the total annihilation of Self. The following verse, richly metaphorical, illustrates:

Deep search and thought achieved this state of nothingness That is how I
stilled the mercurial mind Five kinds of sacrificial fires were lit That is
what brought about radiant light.

The motif of ‘radiant light’ is a recurring one in all mystic poetry, whether in the East or the West. As the opposite of ‘darkness’, it is the dispeller of doubt and a revelation of truth, which is said to be dazzling in nature.

The *vaakhs* reveal a personality well-versed in the Vedas, the Upanishads, Vedanta, and the most advanced Saiva philosophical thought. Rupa Bhavani talks of the concept of non-duality as one who has felt the presence of the Universal Spirit residing within her own self, displaying a rare confidence in prescribing the right path to her listeners. Here is an example:

The one who knows the Cause and the Grace Knows that Day and Night
exist in the mind itself To one who knows the multi_faceted One
through meditation The meaning is clear. The Mind itself knows the
nature of the Self.

The word ‘*zath*’ (nature) in the last line demands attention for a number of reasons. It can mean several things in Kashmiri: caste, species, breed, race, family, lineage, tribe or the true nature of something. The many connotations of the word suggest a wealth of meaning to the listener—at once a reference to the hierarchical structure of the Kashmiri Pandit society where every person has a certain ‘place’ in which he or she must be located. It is also interesting to note that the author preserves her father’s name even as she locates herself in the lineage of Lal Ded, as though to suggest her *zath* in multiple senses of the word. Ironically, it is ultimately the language of caste derived from the social pressure of the very Brahminism against which Rupa Bhavani protests in another subversive *vaakh* (quoted below).

Ferry the river with the wind as ferryman No colour, no caste, no clan
to consider Weed your field and then do the rest Who then the
debtor and who creditor.

Rupa Bhavani must obviously have been born in a culture steeped in a multiplicity of influences, where Sanskrit, the language of the Hindu scriptures and Persian, the official language, were part of ordinary discourse. The ease with which words from both languages become a part of her poetic diction suggests the richness of her linguistic background. The following is a good example of her linguistic virtuosity, where she shifts with ease from the Sanskritised Kashmiri to the Persianised:

If He grant a boon, I would wed myself to my essence My feet slowly
treading the earth I would rise in a resonance of the eternal sound And
the music of the *sarang*, the *veena* and the *chang*.

The word ‘Varaye’ means to wed and offers a perfect example of how even a person or poet who protests against certain social institutions through his or her action—walking out of marriage in Rupa Bhavani’s case—cannot be free from the confines of the existing vocabulary. It is the marital metaphor upon which this passage depends.

‘*Bhumi*’ (the earth) and ‘*gamay*’ (walking) are pure Sanskrit, while ‘*ahang*’ and ‘*chang*’ are Persian words. This verse also indicates a culture familiar with a wide variety of musical instruments—the *sarang* of Kashmir, the *veena* of south India and the *chang* of Central Asia and the

Middle East. The alliteration, the repetitive sibilants and the assonance point to a high skill in musicality.

Rupa Bhavani's philosophy advocates the radical concept of striving to rise above all external or man-made distinctions. That a mystic, devoted to the idea of finding salvation through individual effort and merit, should think of showing a way to the lesser privileged, is astonishing. That is what makes her not only a *yogini*, but a socially concerned human being who called for the removal of many evils from Kashmiri Pandit society. She rejected ritual and mere form in religion.

Metaphors from farming and river transport, common sights in Kashmir, are used to explain the absurdity of set notions of superiority of birth. When the Divine, who ferries souls across the turbulent ocean of this world, has no colour, form, or *gotra* (clan name), who are we to impose such distinctions on mere humans, she seems to say.

While describing the ecstasy of a mystic experience, Rupa Bhavani comes very close to the 'fine madness' of the Sufi dervish, using the metaphor of the *saqi* and cups of intoxicating wine:

the body in bliss, a river of wine!

The cups of these eyes are open O *saqi*, come and fill them to the brim, do!
Hu Hoo Ha! I cry in ecstasy, madness in my heart!

This is another indicator of the liberal education she must have received, which apparently included lessons from Persian poetry. Hence her familiarity with Omar Khayyam (1048–1131) and Hafiz (1320–1389), who use the metaphor of the tavern so liberally in their mystic poetry. The speaker is placed in a state of bliss that has been attained after rigorous mystic practice. She has now reached the state to which Sufis aspire; therefore the terminology used is theirs.

Rupa Bhavani uses similes not only from Hindu mythology, but from day-to-day activities in order to convey thoughts and observations about the transcendental. In the following two *vaakhs*. She deploys the process of making *ghee* (clarified butter), an essential commodity while performing a *yagya*, as a metaphor:

Churn the milk of the mind, yourself the churning
Locate the Primal Point and Sound, break it down with meditation
Heat the butter of knowledge
Spirituality empowered, you will find the ghee
With these ingredients, a *yagya* I perform
Offering the oblation of my own limbs .

The flames that rise are your own effulgence In them my essence revealed,
I stand as myself, finally.

There is a deep concern with the realization of one's true identity, the desire to find the centre of one's being and then to rise above it, but the heaviness of the mystical concern is lightened by the use of a purely domestic metaphor. The images connected with the process of churning also have other connotations to the Hindu, associated as they are with the churning of Kshirsagar, and the childhood of Lord Krishna. All this adds more layers of meaning to the two *vaakhs*.

The sweep of her imagination is as powerful as Lal Ded's, though her language does not have the easy access of the latter:

The air-horse flew upwards, unrestrained Till the Guru, like God Himself,
reined it My body forgotten, in meditation was content Intuitively I
reached that blissful state!

This is, of course, a loose translation, because many blanks need to be filled to understand and critically appreciate this *vaakh*. While the image of the mind as an unbridled horse may not be a remarkable one in mystic poetry, placing the Self in a particular *rashi* (a sign of the zodiac as the blissful state) to ensure a state of deeper awareness is certainly a novel image, jolting in its impact. It is unexpected touches like this that lift some of her *vaakhs* to the level of great poetry. Here is another:

The one who bears the heat that burns Feels the hoo-ha-breath and boils
inwards The dross burns away, the essence springs forth The flaming
cauldron is cooled under a shower of sandal.

The *vaakh* explains the yogic practice of breath control known as *pranayama*. The intense discipline of such practice is supposed to lead not only to self-purification, but also the realization of Truth, every mystic's goal. The verse is a graphic description of this process, using two metaphors from two different worlds, which normally would not rub shoulders together: metallurgy and the kitchen—a poetic tour de force.

Here is one more example of a mystic's observation of the essence and purpose of Being communicated in vivid images:

In itself it's the tree, root and the mulberry In itself the branch, leaf and
flower When the fruit ripens, is ready to taste Its juice a fulfilment, its
nature revealed .

Even though Rupa Bhavani's poetry has a generally sedate, solemn tone, her poet's ear for music gives some of her verses a ringing, dancing rhythm, as in the following two *vaakhs* from her *Rahasyopadesha*, where there is a playful description of the drama of a person's birth, life in this world, and finally, possible self-realization.

Comes into being and is born Weeps and wails and then runs away
Plays with itself in a thousand ways Plunges into enjoyment and
then retreats A taste for attachment, but suddenly comes the call No
denying this pledge solemn!
A sip from that cup, and there's celebration All is ripeness, and the
draught is drained!

There is a brooding intellectuality that characterizes Rupa Bhavani's poetry. Unlike most mystic poets who suggest an intuitive comprehension of the Unknown, she can only merge herself with it after she has analysed the whole process, going over all the steps one by one, pondering over what has been achieved and what remains. That is why her poetry needs an intellectual response as much as an emotional one. There is a sophistication of thought, a simultaneously inward, outward, even upward looking eye, with which our eyes and minds have to be synchronized in order to understand the full import of her poetry. But with a little effort, an appreciation of her poetry is possible even for the uninitiated. It is necessary to draw her out of the confines of sainthood in order to realize that she was not only a mystic, but a talented poet, an extraordinary woman of courage, whose real place in the history of Kashmiri literature and thought, needs to be better researched and understood .

From *Nirvana Dashki*

1. *Sahaz sarvatrayapi swohreth vitsaereyam*
Bahubal swabhav eekant swayambu parmaakaari
Antarmwokhi drashti nervaani rahasya tati parmagati.

Think that the original, all-pervading, immanent, omnipresent, your friend

Omnipotent, unique, self-created, whose form is Supreme
Turn the eye inward, find the secret of Nirvana, attain the Highest Abode.

(Sahaz—sahaj—is a technical term of Tantric Yoga meaning the natural, spontaneous, original state and being.)

2. *Shuddhayoktha mooladhaari kundali mandali Gauri*
Sedi artha sookhma swoshupti tsakhar virakhta shaantaadari
Ishwari Tooryatit parmanandi nettisatsathi
Antarmwokhi drashti nervaani rahasya tati parmagati.

With pure determination, rouse the Kundalini from the muladhara, rounded and white

Through the *chakras*, purposeful, in all states of consciousness, find equipoise

Immersed in God-consciousness, beyond all states of awareness, endless delight!

Turn the eye inward, find the secret of Nirvana, attain the Highest Abode.

3. *Tath Roopmayi tath parmagati sarvathani pravaahi*
Gati gatni poorni chhwada dehi trepitam
Samarath Swami parmarath vidaanam
Antarmwokhi drashti nervaani rahasya tati parmagati.

That beautiful, immanent One, bestower of the highest state, flowing through all creation

Gives wholeness to all, satisfies all hunger

The all-powerful Lord, designer divine of all spirituality
Turn the eye inward, find the secret of Nirvana, attain the Highest
Abode.

4. *Upaneshad parijaata akhyay phal ek*
Arthi Sadgwor Yogi adeho puraanam
Bahu teez vaeni susheelam sudarshanam
Niraayuagraayu param deephpaano
Antarmwokhi drashti nervaan rahasya tati parmagati.

The undecaying fruit of the *Kalptaru* of Upanishads
The real, bodyless yogi, the ancient sadguru
Radiance, speech measureless, beautiful, gentle to behold
Timeless, eternal, brightness unparalleled
Turn the eye inward, find the secret of Nirvana, attain the Highest
Abode.

5. *Pavitar nether pasheth mwokhi antara*
Baho bahudanadi asankhya kaem karat
Yihoy rajyogi data pita suy
Sarva kankhya su arth poorni
Antarmwokhi drashti nervaan rahasya tati parmagati.

Inward-turned, sees herself with an eye purified
Rich in merit, can tackle countless tasks
He is the Rajyogi, the giver, the father
The fulfiller of all desires, He renders you whole
Turn the eye inward, find the secret of Nirvana, attain the Highest
Abode .

6. *Nerlazaa raman par rooph nidara*
Shreshth theth sanhaari velay tseth
Adreshto agrantho nijaano prasanno
Aadideev tath nihaano neshkal thir rooph
Antarmwokhi drashti nervaan rahasya tati parmagati.

Moves beyond shame, unaware of anyone else
Conscious of the acts of Shiva: creation, maintenance, absorption
Invisible, beyond books and knowledge, blissful
Fixed on her primary Lord, whose nature is faultless, timeless and stable
Turn the eye inward, find the secret of Nirvana, attain the Highest Abode.

7. *Ludra vuchcha na aasa na gutri na baashi*
Na kuli na kretyam mahananda roopam
Sheyum than vaasi aadi sarva madyam
Jita sanyasi na beyun beda naadi
Antarmwokhi drashti nervaan rahasya tati parmagati.

No rosary, chanting, or desire for caste –
She needs no family nor ritual in that blissful state
Situating in the sixth *chakra*, in the centre of it all
The all-conquering ascetic, no duality of ‘sound’ and ‘dot’(nada bindu)
Turn the eye inward, find the secret of Nirvana, attain the Highest Abode.

8. *Na jaaya na janmi dagd karmakandi*
Yathaa shaant basmi aroopa swaroopam
Su sarva swokhi adeho samadi
Amoh saavdaanam tath nishkal niraakaar
Antarmwokhi drashti nervaan rahasya tati parmagati.

Freed from the cycle of births and burning all ritual
Ever calm like burnt ashes, formless His nature
Ever blissful, bodyless in samadhi
Aware, free from delusion of the timeless and formless
Turn the eye inward, find the secret of Nirvana, attain the Highest Abode.

9. *Aham ta mamta gaelith theth prelay na aase
Yuth na aase meelith kanvaldal zal bend
Madya aakaashe kadachit brechh na aase
Langi na ta kyah vaatse phala ras gyaeni
Shela zal sang agun daah basmo
Saad tay pasmu sarva antar sreshti
Antarmwokhi drashti nervaana rahasya tati parmagati.*

Ego, attachment crushed, no creation or destruction
For one who is not like a drop on the lotus –
Nor a tree suspended in the centre of the sky
If she dare not, how describe the indescribable fruit?
A rock, water, fire and ashes at times is she
The world contained in her cosmic consciousness, full of wonder-
Turn the eye inward, find the secret of Nirvana, attain the Highest
Abode.

10. *Veedvakh artha amret nadi sampreeta
Aneekh pravaehi samnay shodash tsandrakal
Sa pandita samdarshayagni archanideev
Su nermal tottri sath tav paethi
Sarvatram jagat gworu seeva anant poojni ek
Antarmwokhi drashti nervaana rahasya tati parmagati.*

The river of nectar, the Vedas, quenches thirst
Flowing streams gather all the beams of moonlight
The fulfilled knower knows no difference between one and another
The singer who has mastered the seven notes
The guru of the whole world deserves endless worship –
Turn the eye inward, find the secret of Nirvana, attain the Highest
Abode.

(‘Shodash’, literally 16. The moon is considered to be full with 16 parts or
‘kalas’, hence the number implies fullness.) **From Gyana Khanda**

1. *Om gwar antar that nirmalam
Shuddhamatyantvidyadharam
Lal_nam Lalparmagwaram
Shiva Madhavnahamparmam Brahma soham.*

Om

I have placed my teachers, Lal and Madhav
In my cleansed mind filled with wisdom
I am nought, but become That
The supreme self, I am He .

2. *Gwarithsumarithshunyakhadum
Parudmorumtavaysuti
Pantsaganalchadovum
Gwashprazulumtavaisuti.*

Deep thought led me to nothingness
That's how I stilled my mercurial mind
I lit five fires of sacrifice
That's why there is this radiant light.

3. *Kripa ta karoonyuspanayzaane
Manye mane din tayraath
Sarvaroopdhyanyusparzane
Mane mani ta nanyaszaath.*

There is compassion, there is grace
The one who experiences them
Understands that night and day
Both pass in the mind.

4. *Vardiyi tabuhveraye vasa
Bhumi pad gamay rasa rasa
Khasan ta shabadshunumahang
Sarang rag veena ta chyang.*

If he granted that I wed my own essence
My feet would tread slowly on this earth
I'd rise in harmony with the music
Of the sarang, the veena, and the chhang.

5. *Nav taravaavsavara*

*Na rang navarn ta naguthur
Bronhannyendaypatakarvaray
Kohandaydari ta kas dare.*

Boat crosses river, with wind as its ferryman
Colourless, casteless, of no clan
Weed your field before planting your seeds
Then who gave the credit and whose is the debt?

6. *Yus mani heye dyaan ta paanas tole*

*Kunh na geli ta kansi na gele
Zani Haras ta laages bele
Paanay paanas saeti suy mele.*

The one who meditates and weighs herself
She neither judges nor is judged
She simply waits for His benediction
She will merge with the supreme self .

7. *Deeh anand nada may*

*Lotsan piala mutsur
Saqaaya pilao hu-hu-ha
Bu baha ha-ha matwala.*

My body in bliss a river of wine
My eyes are open, saqi, come fill these cups
Hu hu ha!
I cry, madness in my heart.

8. *Mandhsamudar don sani*
Chhavaksamadhnad-bindutsath
Dan akhandmilayomakhan
Sadikarisdrayomgev
Tavroopyagnahoomaskarith
Ahutditsasanganhunz
Jyot parzanekaaranchyane
Mane atur ta nanyasbwoy.

Churn the milky ocean of your mind
Meditate, locate the naad bindu
Endless churning gives you butter
Practice, purify butter into ghee.

With these, I make a ritual offering
My limbs oblations to the fire
In the rising flames of your radiance
My essence is revealed, I stand as myself.

9. *Hala meli tai zaal nivaare*
Praan lade mare meen
Roog gaali tai yoog sandaare
Boog aahaari kare shareer.

A draught of wine rips through the net
A flailing fish, the breath comes to rest
Afflictions destroyed, yoga practised
Every food then nourishes the body.

10. *Soor gov su phalli ang melan*
Ang sanvaare bang nivaare
Ih na phwale tih vale
Jantar tantar anaahat anaamay akhshay.

The outside burns to ash, the inside blossoms
Adorned, the self drains off the dross

Yantra tantra the unstruck sound practised
To reach the Absolute, beyond suffering .

11. *Par vahare saartha tare*
Duyi veh gale aase tas
Gyaani darshan diyi yakhlaase
Tuli paan paanay kalpan kaase.

She spreads her wings, she's ferried across
The constant ache of duality is gone
Knowing that, she sees Him in everything
She lifts herself, escapes the cycle of births.

12. *Aagar grezith tai nad sedum*
Baana burim tai poorim khaesi
Khen kamaah tai? Vepa nar
Buri buri tai ceyiv yakhlaase.

I thundered from my source and flowed like a river
I filled every vessel, every cup on my way
Who will drink from them? Only those who can
These cups, I have filled them to the brim, drink!

13. *Agar grezvuni amritach nadaa*
Ranzluni prezlaan sadaabut
Teelith ta ladvuni tren bavnan sadaa
Meelith ta samudruch padvee beyi.

I came like a thundering river of nectar
Beautiful, dazzling and timeless
Fulfilled and fulfilling, astride the three worlds
Vast like the expanse of the ocean itself.

14. *Hosh meli tai posh pholaani*
Gosh khelani sadhu sang

*Ganj gyaani chaani roopa dyaani
Krepa chaeni bahudaani rang.*

In consciousness the world flowers
A gathering of saints shines like the sun
The one immersed in you is truly wise
Your grace is generous, it is many hued.

15. *Su maha shama prazlani
Tamah trishna dazani chhe
Ava roop prem chhuy melani
Yim pad kaensi melani kyah.*

The grand lamp dazzles
Where greed and desire burn down
In that place there's nothing but love
Who can reach a place like that ?

16. *Goda karem kaahan atta
Lata divun hovnam dyaan
Shamyom deeh deept aayam vatta
Chhata phervun avay myon paan
Tushum ta kaesnam netran gata
Zan tsaatas gwaran vokhnam gyaan.*

When I bound the eleven together
My contemplation of Him was fleeting
When my pride in the body was crushed
Light enveloped me, I was radiant
When I saw my teacher, I was no longer blind
He revealed the truth to me.

17. *Yus suy beyi beyi ta vetsaare
Inday maaren ta sa haz vitsaar
Sedh tai saadh lagi ath honare
Kaansi lob tai vane kyaah.*

The one who broods continuously on Him alone
Suspends her senses in an effortless stillness
The self-realized and the ascetics all strive for it
The ones who find it are left speechless .

18. *Tyuth dyaanaa heta yuth zaanay ant*
Tyuth sa haz dita yuth paanas me chuh
Tyuth tsuh laagata yuth bakhchuth Shankaras
Yitha paanas mutsraavnas lagem na kenh.

Give me the skill that solves the riddle
Give me the state where I find You in me
Give me all the attributes of Shankara
Or else it's only self-deceit.

19. *Rangith roop draayas sangakuy*
Mokt machith gyaan akuy
Bay bakhchun Rophi gaaraan na kenh
Na kuni bay na kuni veh.

I dyed myself in mystic colour
I was released, began to know
I was fearful, in search of nothing
Till doubts and fears were all dispelled.

20. *Saeri boog aahaare niraahaar*
Na nindre aasi na hushiar
Karith saeri karam neth bekaar
Nethay prezles aham avatar.

He doesn't eat but feeds on the best
He's neither asleep nor fully awake
He does his duties but seems not to work
He's lit with self-knowledge, always.

21. You're in my meditation, you are in me
To this knowledge I bow my head
Knowing oneself brings such delight!
Those who don't know, can't feel this joy.

22. *Kuni na tamaahe kunina takabure*
Shamiyuth sore pure rav
Pal pal pali tai tas na mure
Vaetit vaates pure rav.

Desire nothing, take pride in nothing
Contain the senses, and the inner sun will rise
Grow with each moment and lose nothing
Reach that state and be full as the sun.

23. *Andar trukh tai nebar sedi*
Vuzuvukh naag zaagi rudi tati
Kenh bemaari rostuy moodiy
Kentsan vuod gav na roodiy tati.

Some seem simple, but they really know
Always awake, a spring wells up in them
Easily they pass on to death
Those who don't know, can't go far.

24. *Na namus na kadachit nama na*
Neth mon yemi sada sarvada
Gaashi roop jagi antar ramun
Taethi namas suy gav namun.

I have not bowed, I never will
The one who listens
Is resplendent, within me
That is worship, that's what I do.

25. *Gyaan aakaash vaeni nervaana*
Paanay sahaay than thaanaay chhuy
Aaraam he Ram bolo paavan
Bo ta beyi me manz chhuy ha yi.

Knowledge, nirvana, empty space –
He is all, with you in every state
Peace comes when you speak Ram's name
I am in Him, He is in me. That is all .

26. *Sheyi ayas sheyi chhas*
Mare pana beye chhas
Neerith ti gathsan phirith yivan
Meelith panas akay chhus.

Content I come, content I stay
When I die, I still exist
As I go, I return
I merge into my self, I am the same.

27. *Naad bend pad chhi param*
Maday maerith praktuy chhas
Veshnu Brahma ta Maheshwara
Kresna beyi Shyamsundar chhus.

The seed of sound is the summit
Once pride is crushed you'll understand
He is Vishnu, Brahma, Maheshwara
He is Krishna, beautiful, blue.

28. *Or ti zeeva yor ti zeeva*
Zeevas zeeva ras khyavaan
Yus chhu naanaa rang paana ravaan
Suy chhu prath kuni paana vaataan
Chon myon lon byon byon tai
Na ta chon myon akuy aasaanay.

He's here, he's there
One life feeds another
Who makes forms of many colours
Feeds them, too
The fates we have are not the same
Otherwise, we are the same.

29. *Chhu na kune chhuna kune?*
Vuchhoon or na yor kune
Dis phyur tale mool na kune
Chhivay tseetan swariton kune.

He's not on earth, not high, not low
Not under, not over,
Everywhere, alone, pure and calm
Flawless, ever present, lord of lords.

30. *Kus mare tai kus petrave*
Sodras saare ta tare thaah
Modris ras god diyi shashi avtaare
Paanay paanas prasre gaah.

Who destroys and who preserves
Drains the ocean to find its bed
Pours sweet waters to bring down the moon
To illuminate and know her self ?

31. *Mata pita su braata paanay*
Prath thaamay kath na naye
Niraakaar roop laegith paanay
Sath paanay ta kati sanaa nay?

He is mother, father, brother too
He's everywhere, where is He not?
He assumed a formless form
He is truth, where is He not?

32. *Vaav byon byon ta naav chhus kunuy*
Maerith saeri yim cheni paanths yenday
Tavay sahzkali suti yoog saedith
Sarva vaad zonum gyan paanas hyuv.

Breaths are many but the name is one
Eight stages lead to the only one
Senses destroyed yoga practised effortlessly
With knowledge enhanced all was one .

33. *Kripa kare sarva rooga hare*
Gyani chhaal phire taan taan vesre
Samadi deh vismare soy agnavater
Akhand yagya kare agan prazvaale
Geeta pade beyi tsene kapaal mootse
Goopal Joo naatya kare goopi sahay.

By his grace all sickness is cured
Every fibre in the knower's being rings with ecstasy
Body dissolves when breath suspends
This continual ritual keeps fire burning
Read the Gita, understand and surrender
And Krishna, cowherd, will dance with his lovers.

34. *Darni praeveem ta swarnay peyas*
Hara voni tsuy bar mutsarum
Dim prakosum twarita aasum tsuy
Aash kartham tay khaesi barum.

Born on earth, into contemplation I fell,
You alone, O Hara, will open the doors for me,
Enlighten me, be my ferryman
Roused hope in me, now fill my cup .

35. *Draavvuphevaavrupigur*
Gwar ishwar aav avinashi

*Paan mashe ta dyaan toshe
Swaman parmaanand vaata that raashi.*

The air-horse flew upwards, unrestrained
Till the guru, like God Himself, Immutable, appeared
My body forgotten, in meditation was content
Spontaneously I reached that blissful state.

36. *Sahaz sipar poorith draayas
Ditinam sahz par shaehi ta shah
Hish chhas sahzas laegith
Hyot zan totan ta haari gindun.*

Armed with the sword of spontaneous enlightenment
The Lord of all gave me these wings
And I am one with That itself
Now the parrot and the mynah together play.

37. *Poorith sahz sipar tai
Torgas aaseena log rav
Poshinoool tai veena vaze
Karan shankh sada tai
Ganta vaayaan kreyinad vuze
Divaan chhas Shankaras goud.*

The sword of meditation slung by my side
I mount the horse of twin breaths
The veena of the oriole's song fills the air
The conches resound all around
Cymbals ring, river of practice springs forth
That is how I worship Shiva.

38. *Saavdaan khele ang nachaavaan roze
Ang prazlaan ther vaasan daaraan
Atal saavdaan vah aap Bhagvaan
Bo Shivagath tai tsuh Shiv paan.*

The ever-aware plays and dances as others do
Decks herself, good clothes she wears
Ever-conscious, herself is perfect
On Shiva's path, becomes Shiva Himself.

39. *Yusuy sahay suy paana aasaan*
Athvaasa Shivas ta shunya kas
Yus veh gaale teh nevaare
Suy shareer thaavey paanas bronh.

The one who comes to your aid is within you, always
The void dissolves, hand in hand with Shiva you are
Envy is destroyed and pride discarded
That one alone will go forward.

40. *Diya asi ti taaraa triya autaare*
Yusuy gaaraan suy saetiy chhuy
Bronh bronh pakith dvay ha lose
Nethay poshi ta suy chhuy saath.

Let Him ferry us the incarnate across
The One I search for is next to me
Advancing ahead, duality falls off
Always with you, so close to you.

41. *Yithis baavas thor ma khore*
Muts rozi ta kyah chhus zaaph
Tseth baegrith zaath ma sore
Chhivith ta thurize kati kyah rooph.

Nothing can entangle such dedication
For ever free, what more needs she?
Nothing can distract though living in the world
Let her delight in material joys, her self 'll stay pure.

42. *Baagas tsaayas baage aayas*
Param Shivas Shakti saras
Sharne aayas Lallishwaras
Shri sathgwaras Madhva Shivas
Shreyadivas saakaaras niraakaaras
Antarakis Satkis vretas.

I entered the garden and wedded I was
Submerged in the lake of Shiva and Shakti
Sought refuge in the God Lal worshipped
And in my true Guru, Shiva-Madhava
The primal God, in visible and invisible form.

(An echo of a Lal *vaakh*)

43. *Aham Pad satasaeti ovurum*
Shiv rav hansa paanas onum
Me tsey pyaala burith ha madkiy
Me chav haal pyom suy aakh.

Armed with Truth, my sense of Self was found
The free bird of Shiva-consciousness aroused
I became one with Him
Imbided it and it left an indelible mark.

44. *Mathit patha bronh sathroop*
Meli sathgath ta tattva
Teli roop raag har rang
Meli aatma sangas saeti rav.

Anointing myself, back and front, with Truth
The vision of Absolute reality will appear
Then will one see Him and be united with Him
In all His forms and one will find oneself.

45. *Kaah yeli dazan su yiyi vaare*
Beyi yeli gale atses grekh

*Krood traave boodas su baave
Shehle tsandan dare kraay.*

When the eleven burn down, realization comes
Dross will melt when the pot boils over
Sheds all anger and finds wisdom
The cauldron cools with the flowing sandal .

46. *Sambal yeere vaetsus bo tas
Tamboor saazay yus gom vash
Shashi daari lava dima Mahadeevas
Gomboor totay kyah boli vanya.*

Supported by the flow, I reached Him
The music of the *tamboor* held me in thrall
With streaming moonbeams I bathe Shiva
The parrot, grown sage, is now speechless.

47. *Kueten krepa karath sragvaan
Yiman man lagaan paanas sueti
Yi vyuh traevith su deeh saadaan
Ada pata melaan paanay paanas sueti.*

Some You irrigated with Your own Grace
Those who are immersed in self-realization
They leave off the material, seek the spirit
And then they become one with their real self.

48. *Yihoy kul mool ta shahtul
Yava shaakh pan ta phool
Daat papyav samodra pan
Rasey sawad ta nanes zaath.*

In itself it's the tree, root and the mulberry
In itself the branch, leaf and flower
When the fruit ripens, is ready to taste
Its juice a fulfilment, its nature revealed!

49. *Bana phutri ta paanay thure*
Kus mari ta kas lagi dokh
Paanay nahaave paanay pure
Kus sori ta kas yiyi twokh.

He alone makes the pots and breaks them too
Or who will die or killed be?
He alone is the dancer who makes us dance
Who will decline or who then rise?

50. *Prath jinsas ansha thovun*
Athi kaensi na zeevas thovun
Kati zan onun? Prithsahas pheerith
Byon beyi milovun tvatas sueti.

In every person You put a bit of Yourself
In no one's hands You gave the power
Where did He find it? I would ask Him once
How He mixed such disparate elements into one?

51. *Yivaan paana ta zevaam paana*
Rivaan paana ta nivaan tukh
Naanaprakaari gindaan paana
Rindaana paana ta hevaan path.

Comes into being and is born
Weeps and wails and then runs away
Plays with itself in a thousand ways
Plunges into enjoyment and then retreats!

52. *Pevaan swadas ta yivaan naadas*
Vaadas atsas rachhunas no acharai
Peevaan pyala ta chhivaan paana
Bwovaan paana ta chavaan takh.

A taste for attachment, but suddenly comes the call
No denying this pledge solemn!
A sip from that cup, and there's celebration
All is ripeness, and the draught is drained!

53. *Dyaan chhukh ta aasakh tsuy*
Gyaan gash ta aasakh tsuy
Vegyaan shalaaka aasakh tsuy
Osukh tsuy ta beyi na kaanh.

You visualized the creation and are in it
Knowledge or truth, You are in it
The light of consciousness, you are in it
You alone and no one else.

54. *Mor yus zaale naaray*
Dor na yi sansaaray
Dor su zuve na ta ha mare
Yusuy gale saeri aahaar.

The one who burns the material
Knows that the world is ephemeral
He alone will live and not die
Who has no use for earthly food.

55. *Dyaanas me tsuy ta paanas me tsuy*
Ath gyaanas tse me namaskaar
Paanay paan parzanave ta paanay vetse
Nata azananis vetsiy zaenith kya.

You are in my meditation, You are in me
To such an awareness I bow in obeisance
Knowing oneself fills one with delight
To one not having earned it, such joy cannot come .

56. *Chhu shah ta gada suy tate*
Paanay data khasaan pure rav
Kuni gav raypay kuni gav pure
Phal kulinay moore paanay.

He is the king and he the slave too
He is the sun that nourishes nature
Some He leaves unripe, some He fills with juice
And He it is who consumes the fruit of trees.

57. *Yus roop taari ta deeph sandaare*
Naath chhuna byon ta vechaare man
Kenh moodi ta kenh bemaare
Kansi gyaan khoore taran naav.

The one who overlooks external beauty and lights the lamp
Her mind knows no difference between the Lord and herself
Some are dead-in-life and some are sick
Some are ferried across by the oar of knowledge.

58. *Mata roopi su modur daam pev*
Ada tapasyayi madh modur pev
Dredha karith ta Roopas nishi pev
Rav khot tren bovnan vot.

That sweet draught the Mother poured into me
Hard meditative practice revived that taste in me
And penance made me, Roopa, self-aware
As though the sun rose to shine on the three worlds.

59. *Pad heyi tai pravath chhuy mangaan*
Angan angan shrapaan su rooph
Agna kund yuth zan sandaare
Amret su daaraan pivaan yi dih

The one who treads the path is motivated already
That divine form permeates her body

As though a sacrificial fire is lit by her
Nectar falls on her like a stream.

60. *Paan yemi zon su beyan sandaare*
Nish kaathas tare tsandan boy
Kaath yuth boy heyi tsandan dare

The self, realized, can cleanse others too
Proximity to sandal perfumes the wood
The nearby trees too smell as sweet
Cleansed of evil, one will find oneself.

61. *Daath tsaali ta kyah vechaare*
Man mare tai sandaare paan
Beed gaelith amret tare
Yuth hue rooph kyah vere aav.

No need to think of anything for the self-realized
Checks her mind and improves her self
Duality dies, nectar flows
Such a vision of beauty is at hand.

62. *Arpovum yi zanamtsedanandas*
Hans daar rav rongum swarooph
Krepa gyaan seuti prakaash korun
Darma sueti rotum niraalamb rooph.

Offered this life to the bliss of consciousness
Dyed myself the colour of 'I-am-that'
The knowledge of His grace illumined all
Fulfilling my duty found that formless form.

63. *Yeti kuni vuchhum tati paanay*
Paanay rotum sarvadyaan rooph
Deep prakaash teez rav paanay
Me zon paanay ditimas me thsoh.

Wherever I look He is present
Took hold of Him, the focus of all thought
He is the lamp, its light and the sun
I knew Him in all forms and surrendered to Him.

64. *Gyaan aakaash vaeni nervaana*
Paanay sahaay than thaanaay chhuy
Aaraam he Ram bolo paavan
Bo ta beyi me manz chhuy ha yi.

He is Knowledge, the void and Nirvana
He is with you in all your meditative states
Peace comes with the sacred name of Rama
I am in Him and He is in me—that is all.

65. *Dishaan ta deeshan gwaaraan aayas*
Nish me onum Shivalayas
Chhal lod charkas kal aayi nashaan
Yim shanavay poora mashaan aayi.

Through all directions and worlds I searched for Him
And brought His temple next to me
Sharpened my tool on the wheel and destroyed waywardness
And forgot all the six that distract.

66. *Na prethvi na pethi na paataali*
Na tali na paeri na apaeri tsopaeri
Antar shodh akoy su shaantam
Nermal sarva that deeva deev.

He is neither on earth, nor above nor in the nether world
Neither below nor across, but everywhere
He alone is ever pure, ever calm
Flawless, omnipresent, the Lord of lords.

67. *Himalay ansha yavay lyukh provum
Tavay paan sumrum eka ant
Gyaan garzanaay suti prekrath saedum
Tseetan provum paana paanay manz.*

Once I realized my essence was from the Himalaya
I meditated alone on my self
The burst of awareness revealed my true nature
And supreme-consciousness I found within my own self.

68. *Na daah kare na kentsa praave
Thahraave paan ta srehaave
Kaankshi pure akaankshit vaeni
Paanay data bukhtaa aase
Vaasnay gale branthaa traave
Naanaarang seer paanay dyaave.*

Is envious of no one, nor covets anything
Settles herself in stillness, sustained with love
Fulfilled in herself, detached from all
The giver herself, herself who enjoys it all
Kills desires, gives up delusions
Multihued secrets, the self realized unfolds.

69. *Saeri tattva aahaerim gaar tsopum
Bramvovum akhand mandal ta paataal
Ha hoo sueten gev veglovum
Anga vopazaevam paanay Gang.*

Inside this body-cave I fed on all the elements
Traversed this whole globe and the nether world
With the fire of breath control I melted the ghee
And from my own limbs made the Ganga spring forth.

70. *Tsethay laegith parduy paan zaan
Tsethay laegith parznaav paan*

*Tsethay laegith kaay chhay parzaan
Kaay zaan meeth ta shod zaan paan.*

The self-realized consciousness sees others as itself
The self-realized consciousness knows itself
The self-realized consciousness knows the body
Know your body as sweet and yourself pure.

71. *Vaav rath dwadashaant rav sangate
Maayaayi treshnaayi mare man
Braanth traav naath chhuy panane gare
Saath rath yihoy chhuy gyaanay deeh.*

Control your breath and reach the highest chakra
The light of the sun will dissolve illusion and greed
Give up illusions, the Lord is within you
Seize the auspicious moment, that is true knowledge .

72. *Yus hum suy maduras gev kani diye
Kand hume khand humi pananuy deh
Sriphal zaaphal suphal heye
Moorith shor ta navee das zay.*

The one who offers the juice of his joys as ghee
His body as candy and sweets to this sacrificial fire
As other ingredients his own head and ego
Salutations to such a sacrifice and its fruit!

73. *Samiv trekaaran kina akuy beyi
Paanuti beyi kina yihoy akuy
Yeginas behe ta basma karihe
Anga na beyi kenh aangan draav.*

The three causes or the One again
Is He more than Himself or just the One?
In the sacred fire, reduces all veils to ashes
And is freed from the compound of the world.

74. *Pata thsaal pheerith ta khodum*
Metsi ta kani manz onum pay
Ada nad vuzum ta gala mad pevum
Prabaat snaat sat prozol tan a kenh.

I leaped into the past and found Him at last
Knew the difference between earth and stone
Then the river burst forth and my throat found wine
Like a morning bath, truth shone bright, nothing remained!

75. *Hani hani paataal gagan game*
Moorat na moorat paanths tattva
Tseetan milihe shoonyati gale
Shanavaneey Chhay akaiy sath.

Slowly traverses from the netherworld to the skies
Embodied or bodyless, the five elements!
Consciousness is found and the void disappears
All the six focused on one set goal.

76. *Ase beyi na aase paan*
Naase graas kare pavan
Ras kaankhe na kenh phase
Naaseet kanh aaseet beyi

Only He exists, nothing else
For the seeker, her breath the only food
Only seeks the divine drink, no other desire has she
Nothing else matters, nothing else.

77. *Draayes ta nervun aaham zange,*
Tse na ta kaarun, mange kas
Ranga rangi gul phvolehe ange
Me na ta beyi tseth tsenge kas?

As I left on my quest, You crossed my path
You the cause, what else to ask for?
My body sprouts flowers multi-hued
If not me, who should rejoice in abandon?

78. *Padvi vina maa traav paad*
Vada poorakh ada chhuy vasa
Brakun naabad grakun khaasya
Param pudi Parmanand haesil chhuy.

Boast not till you reach the goal
Beyond all isms is the real abode
Chunks of crystallized sugar and steaming drinks
All this and more in that highest blissful state .

79. *Roopayi ti yih aayiy varaa*
Nara niralamba kunuy roop
Krips kar aanand zaan varaa
Avataar ruma ruma rooph.

For Rupa the personified boon has come
He, the supportless, the one alone
His grace befalls, know Him as pure bliss
His incarnation suffuses all her pores.

80. *Yavay dyaan bartsar kare*
Tavay gyan aadre paan
Yavay pyar basmay kare
Tavay lay su mare smare paan.

When concentrated meditation fills you up
You will find honour for true knowledge
When love reduces you to ashes
Absorbed in Him, will know your true self.

81. *Yus tatva traevith mukhes laage*
Prayna preyam lage paar
Vathri gyan ta paan vodare
Shunya shunyas saeti milave.

The one who deserts the physical and turns to salvation
Uses love as a tool and finds the shore
Lies on a bed of knowledge and rouses the self
Emptied of the material, merges into the void.

82. *Gyaanuk ansha aayom athe*
Gaz su morum tavay seati
Yava saeti zan vopudovum
Teey thaharovum tseetas saeti.

I had found a bit of knowledge for myself
With that I tamed the ego-elephant
Roused the awareness of my self
Made it a steady part of my mind.

83. *Na korum rut na yaths zonum*
Tseyi rut tas rut kenh korum na
Moodmutay yi dih sandorum
Na ta zeevantay maraha bo mav.

Nothing good did I do, nothing willed
Did not wish you well, nor him or her
All I did was to deck this dead body
Doing this I died while still alive.

84. *Aagar pheerith ta nay grozum*
Vogavani dooruy sagavum ma
Oray kripa ta aalav borun
Yor kenh na sworum ma.

Emerging from the source, I did not roar
Did not use flood waters to irrigate my field

He is the one whose call showered me with grace
Nothing sought I on my own.

85. *Saavdaan khele ang nachaavaan roze*
Ang prazlaan ther vaasan daaraan
Atal saavdaan vah aap Bhagvaan
Bo Shivagath tai tsuh Shiv paan.

The ever-alert plays and dances as others do
Decks herself, good clothes she wears
Ever-conscious, herself is perfect
On Shiva's path, becomes Shiva Himself.

Notes on the Translation bindu–nada: literally ‘point’ or ‘drop’ and ‘sound’ or ‘resonance’, this conceptual pair is related to Tantric Yoga and to an analysis of language or mantra. Bindu implies also a condensation of light or an undivided light-filled point, a drop of energy, which, in Yoga, is situated and experienced by the yogi between the eyebrows; nada is situated above it on the forehead; it is also the subtle inner sound heard by yogis.

(refer to verse 27) ***Sahaja (sahaz):*** literally ‘born with’, hence natural, spontaneous, denotes a mystical state of perfect naturalness; also an attribute of the divine

(it occurs frequently) ***Aham:*** ‘I’, ultimate I-consciousness; ***so’ham:*** ‘I am He’ is a mantra of identification with the divine I-consciousness or Siva. This mantra is also called *ha?sa-mantra*. Relate to verse 43 and others

Note on verse 35 and similar related to flying: There is a mystical term in Tantric Yoga related to moving in the space of consciousness, or moving in actual space with the subtle body: *khecari*. Although this term does not occur in her *vaakh*, it is implied by the allusion to a mystical flight which she experienced.

Note on verse 38: This and similar verses refer to the central spiritual practice in Kashmir Saivism which is the practice of awareness: *savadhana*, which is the only condition for remaining in an ever-present state of consciousness or identity with Siva.

Note on verse 43: See above, the *ha?sa-mantra* of identification with Siva: *so’ham*, combined with breath (exhalation = *sa?/so*, inhalation = ‘*ham*’)

Note on verse 71: *Dvadasanta* literally the end of twelve (finger breadths), in the ascent of *prana/kundalini* the distance of the highest *cakra* above the head

Note on verse 72: This and similar verses can be related to *Sivasutra* 2:8: *sarira?havi?*, ‘the body is an offering (in the divine I-consciousness’. Cf. also *Vijñana Bhairava* verses 149: ‘Oblation (*homa*) consists in offering all the elements, the senses and sense-objects along with the mind into the fire of the Great Abode of the Void, using awareness as the sacrificial ladle.’

Note on verse 79, *niralamba*: Several practices described in the *Vijñana Bhairava* refer to a supportless state of the mind, *niralamba* or *niradhara*, e.g.: ‘Fixing one’s gaze without blinking on an external object and making the mind supportless in a short time, one will attain Siva.’

Note on verse 81: The void merging in the great void occurs in several verses of the *Vijñana Bhairava*, e.g. 39, 58, 127 (where *sunya* is itself an attribute of Siva, as elsewhere)

Note on verse 83: This verse, especially the last line, seems to refer to a state of *jivanmukti*, which means you have already transcended death and now continue to live.



Introduction

Aranimal was born in Palhalan, a village near Patan, north Kashmir, in 1737 AD, when Kashmir was under Afghan rule.

While still a child she was married to Bhavani Dass Kachru of Rainawari, Srinagar. Her husband, grew up to be a scholar of Farsi and won appreciation from the Afghan Governor in Kashmir, Jumma Khan. He is credited with the authorship of *Behr-i-Taveel* in Farsi. Later he even went to Kabul as an important functionary and became part of the court elite and adopted their ways, while Arnimal suffered the fate of a forsaken wife.

Legend has it that even while he was at home, his mother had contrived a strategy to make him a son cast in the Oedipal mould. It is said that soon after his marriage she asked him to share her bed, which she had made dripping wet beforehand. When he complained that he could not sleep in a wet bed, she told him that when he was an infant, it had been she who had to sleep, night after night in an equally wet bed! Overcome with guilt he became a devoted son rather than a faithful husband.

There is a dispute about the authorship of many of Arnimal's lyrics, and some critics like Amin Kamil go so far as to deny her very existence, dividing up her legacy between Habba Khatun and Mahmud Gami. But though the Hur (the first line) of her popular song 'Arini rang gom', is the same as that of one of Gami's lyrics, it does not prove that the whole lyric is the latter's. Kashmiri writers have often used a line from a well-known, popular poem and built their own compositions on it. After all, resonances and echoes of heard songs are always there and these find their way into the work of other poets.

Several images used by Arnimal could only have come from someone steeped in Kashmiri Pandit culture. The reference to sandal paste rather than henna while describing her toilette and the allusion to Ruma Rishi, rather than Khwaja Khizar (both are supposed to be immortal in Kashmiri Pandit and Muslim mythology, respectively) in wishing her husband a long

life, are some of the hints that suggest that the composer of these lyrics must have been born in and continued to belong to the Kashmiri Pandit tradition.

With Arnimal we enter a world, which has little to do with the other-worldly. This poet of great romantic sensibility is concerned with the here and now. There is no doubt a quest too, but it is a quest for the embodied one, not of the spirit. It is pure passion, a longing for the earthly lover, in her case an absentee husband, whose rejection she cannot accept. She protests, expressing the pain of being a helpless woman, who has things happening to her instead of being a 'subject woman' who can make things happen according to her will. But the fact of speaking out is itself a revolt of the victim.

Words are her tools to give herself an agency. And what a wealth she has at her command! Her rich vocabulary and diction are a proof of her mastery of the craft of poetry. Like Habba Khatun, she weaves charming images and rhymes to great effect. The beauty of fern and flower give her novel metaphors. Her imagination, fed on these sights, blossoms into striking imagery. The sensuous description transcends the emotions of pain. The sounds of the words have a musical quality that turns the poems into songs. This is what makes them easy to memorize and why they live on even though they were never written down. Here is an example:

What should I tell you O Love, what?
All that I suffered for love of you?
Or the judgment of Fate should I tell?
What should I tell you O Love, what?

A burst of almond blossoms fills my garden
But in my spring itself I was lost, should I tell?
What should I tell you O Love, what?

Apricot blossoms on the trees in my garden
They all bloomed, waiting for you, should I tell?
What should I tell you O Love, what?

Cherry blossoms festoon my garden
Hollow comfort you offered, should I tell?

What should I tell you O Love, what?

Pear blossoms everywhere in my garden
All branches decked up, should I tell?
What should I tell you O Love, what?

Arnim's work has more than a few surprises for us. She lived at a time when Kashmiri society must have been under great strain, living under Afghan rule, where feudalism and patriarchy were in full strength and even the privileged did not have the liberty of voicing their feelings. It is astonishing, therefore, to find a woman, particularly one from a conservative Kashmiri Pandit family, doing so, uninhibitedly in her poems. Here we see a woman who would not submit quietly to ill treatment in a patriarchal society, nor allow herself to be banished to the attic as a madwoman. She protests against his cruel spurning, exposing his faithlessness in unsparing words and in the process we hear songs of great beauty. It is the wail of a victim of patriarchy in its various forms, in which there is no compassion, only mockery for a woman discarded by her husband:

My garment is soaked in tears, wild one
I wait, lovesick, while the days drag by
I came dressed up and adorned for you
In what madness did you run away?
I'm spurned, scorned, and taunted
I wait, lovesick, while the days drag by.

The longing and reproach are palpable:

My garden waits for your footstep
Place your foot upon my head
Let me wear your footprint like a crown
In the ache of longing, I tore my veil
Will you never return to me?
I was once a wreath of jasmine
I've withered now to a blade of grass

Let me wear your footprint like a crown.

The words 'I tore my veil' are a bold admission that once her husband's rejection has exposed her to ridicule, there is no need for womanly coyness. Arnimal talked about the subject of domestic violence and abuse two hundred years before it came out of the closet and raised public opinion. Fulfilment is sometimes as painful as the desire for it, because the man only inflicts mor e

pain, brutally pulling off her ornaments, leaving her bereft, emotionally and materially. The poem strikes a powerful note on behalf of all women-victims of betrayal and violence, even while using the poetic devices of alliterative sounds and soft musical contrasts. Here is deep emotion tempered by irony, pain soothed by sights of beauty, conventional diction suddenly lit up by an unusual phrase:

In sleep he grabbed my wrist, maddened am I
The armband digs into my flesh
One by one he tore off my gold
All ornaments plucked off my body
Was anyone violated like me?

While the husband, Bhavanidass Kachru might have won some laurels at the Afghan court at Kabul for his Farsi scholarship and poetic skill, his name in Kashmir is forever smeared by one women's softly worded but powerful arraignment.

1. *Ha valo moni pholi vandayo paadan*
Aadan baaji myaani yaaro ve.
Kukile paethi draav kola raadan
Vokale Vonda myon raevith gov.
Me kali chaane braenti gayi naavan
Aadan baaji myaani yaaro ve,

Tsento leduri posh pholi kola raadan
Az chhum aadan vaada yiyimo lo,
Diham nay darshun sar vanday paadan,
Aadan baaji myaani yaaro ve.

The jewels of my eyes I'll lay at your feet
Come beloved mine, my childhood friend

You flew like a bird to rivers and shallows
my heart tore in two –
the calls I heard were not yours
Come beloved mine, my childhood friend.

Yellow blossoms festoon the banks
I know you'll keep your promise today
If you come, I'll lay my head at your feet
Come beloved mine, my childhood friend .

2. *Me kari tas kits poshi maala ta*
Chhavi na hiy chhas meni druy.
Haavasa barimas maski pyaala ta
Yiyina loli manz karhas jayi ta
Darshana tahande baal sambaala ta
Chhavi na hiy chhas meni druy.

Garlands of flowers I weave for him
Won't he revel in the jasmine for me?
Desire fills these goblets with wine
He has a place in this heart of mine

One glimpse of his face will give me my life
Won't he revel in the jasmine for me?

3. *Kar lagan chaeni kadam saani aangnay*
Sheri hemayo valo.
Bo draayas darda chaane parda tsatith
Beyi yitamo lo
Bo hee maal aesus motseyas
Poshi tulo ho valo.

My garden waits for your footstep
Place your foot upon my head
Let me wear your footprint like a crown
In the ache of longing, I tore my veil
Will you never return to me?
I was once a wreath of jasmine
I've withered now to a blade of grass
Let me wear your footprint like a crown.

4. *Goon goon mo kar ha yendaro*
Kanaren pholilah malaye lo.
Rabi tala kaer tul sumbalo
Yamberzal pyaala heth praaraan chhay.
Heethar chhas nay dubaara pholayo,
Goon goon mo kar ha yendaro,
Kanaren pholilah malayo lo.

Hum not with pain, my spinning wheel
I'll soothe your aches with scented oils
Hyacinth, lift your head from the mud
The narcissus waits with her brimming cup
A jasmine bush am I, I will not bloom again
Hum not with pain, my spinning wheel
I'll soothe your aches with scented oils.

5. *Daamana bodum ashi mati*
Kaamani praaraan doh gom.
Saamaana gandith aayas
Yoot kyah loguy nashi mati
Paaman laejithas kyah kara
Kaamani praaraan doh gom.

My garment is soaked in tears, wild one
I wait, lovesick, while the days drag by
I came dressed up and adorned for you
In what madness did you run away?
I'm spurned, scorned, and taunted
I wait, lovesick, while the days drag by.

6. *Aayas bo neerith shoka chaane*
Chaerith vuchhimay bumay.
Me konthsamay tse loguyo Rumareshun aay
Daay kami dyutanay chhay no pheran may.

Driven by love I came rushing out
Only to see your eyebrows, arched
Ruma Rishi's age be yours
May you live long my faithless one
But tell me, who gives you counsel?
Not once do you look my way .

7. *Chham me laadan aki lati yiyihe*
Hati kuy vandse pananuy rath.
Raavrith aadan paadan pemasay
Lati kava karrnam lath.

Vana kas vesiye sona chham gelan
Yana yaeri traevnam karni kath.
Shay yaeri roozitan tooshitan parzan
Toti chham vondasay roozith sath.

I long for him, won't he come even once?
I would shed blood from my throat for him
Prince of my youth – I fall at your feet
Don't tread on the tendrils that cling to your heel.

Who do I speak to? My rivals exult
Since he turned his face away from me
Though he loves others, let him live, let him thrive
My heart will still glow as long as he lives.

8. *Sona chham gelaan kuni chhum na melaan*
Parzani suti chhum khelaeni.
Ishqa daedi soor kor Parbat shilan
Ishqa tsoor phor balveeraene
Ishqa dod hani hani tani chhum telaan
Parzani suti chum khelaeni.

He is gone. My search never ends
He plays with outsiders in faraway lands
While my rivals snigger and gloat
Love's fire burnt the mountain to ashes
Consumed the peace in warrior's hearts
Slowly pain seeps into my being
While with my rivals he plays.

9. *Arini rang gom shraavana heeye*
Kar yeeye darshun deeye.
Shamasondar paaman bo laejis
Aama taavay kotah zaejis
Naama paegaam tas kus neeye
Kar yeeye darshun me deeye.

Kanda naabad aarudmutay
Phanda karith tsolum kotuy
Khinda karinam lookan theeye
Kara yeeye darshun deeye.

*Suli votith sangarmaalan
Laala thsaaran kohan ta baalan
Chhas bo praaraan tahanze zeeye
Kara yeeye darshun deeye.*

*Bo chhas praaraan manz Palhaalan
Laala pheraan Tulimuli naalan
Poshi daelya tas kus neeye
Kara yeeye darshun deeye.*

I was a summer jasmine, with an ivory glow
Without lustre, wan and pale I wait
When will he come and show me his face?

Like blue Krishna he left me to shame
I am scorched and scarred by cruel mouths
Can no one carry a whisper, tell him of my plight
When will he come and show me his face?

I tempted him with sweets and crystals of sugar
But he disappeared. Where did he hide?
Now he laughs at me with all of them
When will he come and show me his face?

I will rise with the first ray of the sun
And look for him through valley and hill
I long to drown in his abundance
When will he come and show me his face?

While I wait for him in Palhaalan
He plays in the streams of Tulmul
Will someone carry my flowers to him?
When will he come and show me his face ?

10. *Padmaani kar yiyam tay
Vadanas chhum na thsen
Osh chhas traavaan tsaale tsaale
Lashi naara zaejinas myulum osh tay an.*

I was lovely as Padmini, but he never came
The stream of my tears did not run dry
They flowed unbroken, a flood of grief
I was seared by a flaming torch
My food swam in tears, but he never came.

11. *Ruma ruma latiyē kava chum maaraeni*
Hari na son pay aayes neerith bo
Nehagati tsolumay Sendavaava traevith
Tiy kas nishi heka baevith bo.

Gari baal draayās saamaana paerith,
Kaamani praaraan loosum doh,
Paaman laejinas gom tambalaevith
Tiy kas nishi heka baevith bo.

Why does he trample me underfoot?
I gave up my wealth to follow him
But he left me in the dark of night
To the stormy river winds
Whom can I tell of my plight?

I left home dressed and ready
But the day passes and the wait doesn't end
I was seduced and abandoned to taunts
Whom can I tell of my plight?

12. *Vanta vesi kus kas ptse*
Kus vunyub karith gom
Hatsi lomnam nendri matse
Mathsiband saenith gom
Swan nyumam ratsi ratse
Kus vunyub karith gom.

Tell me friend, who's to be trusted?
Is there a bigger fool than I?
He grabbed my wrist while I was asleep

The armband dug into my flesh
He tore off my gold
He stripped off each jewel
Tell me friend, who's to be trusted?
Is there a bigger fool than I?

13. *Han han chham lola chaani baerith*
Zol chham na yivaan sondre sondre
Teeri mijgaan dititham daerith
Gaem jigras panjre panjre.
Vuths vaeinj haavay mutsraevith
Zol chham no yivaan sondre sondre.
Daedilad chhas kota heka tsaeth
Pahipan zan harayo harayo
Mathsi mathsiband gathsay laerith
Zol chham no yivan sondre sondre.
Gachhi kuthinay thaavay vathraevith
Lachhinavyo mandore saani beh
Achhi daer zan rozay paerith
Zol chham noyivaan sondre sondre.
Lala gomo baaga manz neerith
Posh laagass gondre gondre
Kenh na mangahas yiyam na pheerith
Zol chham noyivan sondre sondre.

The pores of my skin, my sinews and cells
Are filled with love, my love
Not once do my eyes close in sleep.

Arrows from your arched eyebrows
Pierce my heart, it is riddled with holes
Where do the lovelorn go for peace?
Not once do my eyes close in sleep.

Let me tear my heart out and show it
I fall and decay like an autumn leaf

I'd be the armband that clings to your flesh
Not once do my eyes close in sleep.

I'll lay out fine silks in the bedroom for you
Precious one, won't you stay a while
Like a doll I'll wear a bride's garments for you
Not once do my eyes close in sleep.

My love stole away from my garden
Though I worshipped him with flowers
And asked for nothing but a glance from him
Not once do my eyes close in sleep.

14. *Yaam Hoori me toori tsandun molmay*
Taam tsolmay yaar vesi,
Dapyom aagas bo roshi zaagas
Laagas bo sheri hee.
Vonda kis baagas posha pholamay
Taam tsolumay yaar vesi.

I was anointing myself with sandal, friend
When my love stole away
I thought I'd wait for my master
Adorn his head with sandal and flowers
So that spring would return to my heart
But my love stole away .

15. *Aasha vanden hundi aasho ve*
Gati manza haavtam gaasho ve
Lhasan gomo raasho ve
Praaraan chhasayo aasho ve
Metran hunduy byola vovize
Shatrun ti karizi na naasho ve.

Hope of the hopeless
Show me light in the dark
He's gone to Lhasa

I wait for hope in my heart
Cast seeds of friendship where you may
Keep even our enemies safe.

16. *Neza yaeri loynam ratnas naala*
Naalachi tsajinam maala ve
Dil myon niyuth aki moha vala
Hatikuy mokhta aav chhakravan
Naalachi tsajinam maala ve
Toti gothsaham tsui.

With his spear he pinned me down
My necklace broke, my blouse was torn
One hair of his beloved head
Is enough to pluck out my heart
The pearls from my neck lie scattered
He tore them off my throat
Still, I'd have him near.

17. *Agana gagana gagraaye*
Naba naara vuzmala draaye.
Antan piyu antan piyu.
Aangana saani chhay phojimuts heey
Tsatith laagashere.
Antan yee antan yee.

Thunder roars through the fiery sky
Lightning flashes through the fire
Bring him back to me
Jasmine flowers in my garden
I will pluck some for his brow
Bring him back to me.

18. *Kya vanayo mati kya vanayo*
Yi gom panas ta ti vanayo

*Lanyun nyay chum ta ti vanayo
Kya vanayo mati kya vanayo.*

*Bagas menis badam phulaya
Adan raevus ta ti vanayo
Kya vanayo mati kya vanayo.*

*Bagas menis tsera phulaya
Veri chani phojima ta ti vanayo
Kya vanayo mati kya vanayo.*

*Bagas menis gilās phulaya
Dilasa dititham ta ti vanayo
Kya vanayo mati kya vanayo.*

*Bagas menis tanga phulaya
Langi langi phojsay ta ti vanayo
Kya vanayo mati kya vanayo.*

*Bagas menis aelichi phulaya
Lelichi kari tham ta ti vanayo
Kya vanayo mati kya vanayo.*

What should I tell you O Love, what?
All that I suffered for love of you?
Or the judgment of Fate should I tell?
What should I tell you O Love, what?

A burst of almond blossoms fills my garden
But in my Spring itself I was lost, should I tell?
What should I tell you O Love, what?

Apricot blossoms on the trees in my garden
They all bloomed, waiting for you, should I tell?
What should I tell you O Love, what?

Cherry blossoms festoon my garden
Hollow comfort you offered, should I tell?
What should I tell you O Love, what?

Pear blossoms everywhere in my garden
All branches decked up, should I tell?
What should I tell you O Love, what?

introduced and translated by
NEERJA MATTOO

THE
MYSTIC

and

THE
LYRIC

four women poets from Kashmir

